

BRITISH ARTISTS

ROMNEY

Edited by S. C. KAINES SMITH

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S. C. KAINES SMITH, M.A., M.B.E.

The volumes at present arranged comprise the following, here given in chronological order.

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- I. The XVI Century Painters.
With a note on the influence of Holbein.
- II. Cornelius Johnson and Jamesone.
- III. Dobson and Robert Walker.
With a note on the work of Van Dyck in England.
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OTHERS IN PREPARATION.



National Portrait Gallery

Portrait of the Artist

GEORGE ROMNEY

BRITISH ARTISTS

EDITED BY

S. C. KAINES SMITH, M.A.

ROMNEY

By

B. L. K. HENDERSON, D.LIT.



NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

497
R7
H5

First Published in 1922

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

FOREWORD

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend, Hector Suffling, Barrister-at-Law, for generous assistance in this little book. Originally it was our intention to work together throughout in the gathering of material ; but events occurred that rendered this impossible to the extent we had contemplated. However, it would be unfair not to pay full tribute to Mr. Suffling's skilful contribution. The book has gained very materially by his aid, and lost much by his inability to proceed further in his co-operation.

I have also to make the following acknowledgments : to the Director of the National Gallery, for permission to reproduce *The Beaumont Family*, *Mr. & Mrs. William Lindow*, *Jacob Morland*, and the *Lady and Child* ; to the Director of the National Portrait Gallery, for the *Portrait of the Artist* and *Richard Cumberland* ; to Mrs. F. Davies, for *Miss Casson* ; and to Lord Alfred de Rothschild, for *Lady Hamilton as " Emma."*

B. L. K. HENDERSON.

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PREFACE

I HAVE heard the possessor of a small but splendid house, full of seventeenth and eighteenth century forebears, complain that they were difficult to live up to, and my first impulse was to quote that proverb of Spain which says that God gives almonds to those who have no teeth. Reynolds was there, and Gainsborough, beside whom Cotes and Hudson did their best, and Highmore, prim and dignified ; while Lely and Riley, and, for the parson member of the family, excellent Mary Beale, helped to people the walls. It was a noble company. Yet at the end of a week of their society I began to sympathise, just a little, with my host ; I felt that they had to be lived up to.

There was no Romney there. One does not live up to Romney's portraits, one lives with them. They are accommodating, friendly folk, looking their best on purpose to please, rather than to impress us. Their personality is not so underlined as to intrude upon our own. Their modelling, their

light and shade, do not clamour for recognition, and the artist, reticent in his work as he was in his life, does not obtrude his skill upon us, but is content to turn it, by an alchemy that is quite his own, into pure and simple pleasure of the eyes.

That, I think, is the secret of Romney's popularity—for popular he undoubtedly is. The slowness of his rise to fame, as the sale-room measures fame, is due largely to the fact that he is not an artist's artist. There are moments when his drawing is positively wild ; there are instances when his wonderful instinct for decorative design, combined with the broad temerity of his brushwork, reduce his work almost to the quality of a lovely wall-decoration, with human form added to it as an accident. The purity and unerring harmony of his colour so far transcend the vitality of some of his portraits as portraits, that the picture, divested of all reference to anything but itself, can be, and is, enjoyed simply as a thing of beauty—and on this ground the mere layman can share a standpoint with the professional critic and the theorist in æsthetic.

Dr. Henderson expresses regret that the conditions of Romney's life prevented him from launching out into imaginative

subjects ; speaking for myself, I am very content that it should have been so. The readers of this book will rejoice with me to find in Dr. Henderson a prophet of the greatness of Romney, and will admit the force of his argument that the painter who could produce such joyous work even while bound by the trammels of portraiture, might well have been among the world's greatest imaginative painters. But if that had been so, we must inevitably have lost the Romney that we have, and that is a loss that I cannot contemplate with calm ; for we should have lost a human being and an artist as well as a portrait painter.

An essential part of the charm—that is the only possible word—of Romney's portraits lies in that very sameness which has been the sport of some critics of his work. It is perfectly true that, working perpetually, and always at speed, he has reduced the component parts of a woman's face to a series of formulæ, which he combines and recombines in slightly varying ways. It is perfectly true that from 1782 onwards all his work is more or less adapted to the formula in part derived from, in part imposed upon, the features of Emma Hart. But this is all to the good, for the result

of it is that his pictures are, so to speak, submissive to our enjoyment. We can take their method for granted, for we know it by heart, and we can be content to thank Heaven, as probably many of his sitters did, that he has made them less like themselves than like his own ideal.

Dr. Henderson has pointed out that those who used Romney as a portrait painter were but rarely interested in him as a man ; and I think that, Lady Hamilton apart, there is very little, if any, evidence that Romney took any more personal interest in the generality of his sitters than they took in him. In saying that this results in a marked quality of impersonal uniformity in his portraits, I am neither disparaging Romney nor differing from Dr. Henderson in his estimate of Romney as a painter of character. I am merely asserting that as an imaginative painter Romney found scope for self-expression within the limits imposed upon him by portrait-painting, with the result that, whatever the subject, a " Romney " is always a piece of Romney himself ; its purity and simplicity are those of the man's own mind, its very lack of penetration is part of his own shyness, its occasional depth and force are the outcome of

his own rare sympathies, as in the *John Wesley*.

Dr. Henderson has written with enthusiasm, and I think that enthusiasm is needed, if one is to get beyond enjoyment to understanding of such a man and such a painter as Romney. The work of many artists calls for cold and deliberate analysis, and that of many others for the application of highly developed principles of æsthetic ; but to attempt the criticism of the work of George Romney on such lines as these would be to abandon the natural and unstudied delight that he derived from simple beauty of colour and design, and that he strove to pass on by unsophisticated craft.

If the work of Romney had been difficult to enjoy, he would have rivalled Reynolds long ago ; but nothing shakes the confidence of the professed critic in the greatness of a painter more than the discovery that any school-girl can enjoy his pictures. It is just because Romney's pictures are lovable and "liveable" that he has been long in coming into his own, and only time has brought the great ones of the earth to accept the verdict of ordinary folk, whose very tenacity in holding to their love has hindered

the critics in their studies. There must still be scores of portraits from this painter's prolific hand hidden in the homes of those that love them without the thought of art or of sale-rooms, much as the picture which is here reproduced for the first time, the portrait of little *Miss Casson*, was hidden when I met with it less than a year ago. It was unknown to Messrs. Ward & Roberts, and can scarcely have been seen by any outside a narrow circle, since it was first brought home from Cavendish Square; painted to commemorate the infant genius of a child who, when but seven years old, had performed in public on the instrument that figures in the picture, it had been a "family possession" ever since; and is, I think, a testimony to the sincerity and simplicity of the painter's ideals, that, in simple surroundings, it was in no wise out of place. A Reynolds there would have looked like a Field-Marshal in a sentry-box; a Gainsborough like a court-lady in a country lane. But *Miss Casson* looked like what she was, a little girl at home.

One does not live up to Romney's portraits, one lives with them—if one has the luck.

S. C. KAINES SMITH.

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CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND PERSONAL.

WHEN we stand before a picture painted by a great master of bygone days, and study not only the subject itself but the technique of the artist, it is strange how profoundly the work affects us. More than printed book, or strains of music, this canvas with its coat of paint speaks straight to the heart, evoking the years that have sped. To read a passage from Shakespeare is to share awhile his thought, or to look through his eyes upon the concourse of life around him ; yet apart from thought there is no comradeship in the volume we hold. Shakespeare's hand never touched it ; his eyes never rested on it. If it had been so, our hearts would glow each time our fingers came in contact with its pages.

In this respect the picture is altogether different. It is, as it were, a little canvas

world into which the human creator of a bygone day worked his soul and said : " Let there be light." As we look at it, there are moments in which we feel strongly and disturbingly near to the man who fashioned it from his own brain. We can see, as though they had been made yesterday, the marks of his brush. We know that we are standing as he stood when he looked upon his creation, and saw that it was good. This picture is, indeed, no cold, dull thing. It was once the very life of the man, a phase of his existence that passed from his heart of hearts to his canvas, to remind us of the world in which he lived and moved.

In reviewing the main features of the life of George Romney it is well to recollect that, while the life of an ordinary man is never entirely isolated, that of an eminent person, by reason of his station, necessarily comes into touch with much that is vital to the age in which he lives. We have yet, so it would seem, much to learn before we understand the eighteenth century with its manifold activities and experimental modes of life. The nineteenth century, a next-door neighbour among the centuries, was somewhat

inclined to disregard the true greatness of the preceding hundred years, and to underestimate, with true neighbourly disdain, the significance of their history. In all probability, as the English race moves further along the pathway of time, it will come to a higher estimate of generations that established the material and spiritual foundations of our Empire, and set to work schemes that have since become dominant impulses in our national life. Our descendants will see more distinctly the meaning of an age which, after all, is historically still very close to us, and they will extol, as we cannot yet do, the self-sacrifice and energy, the foresight and the skill that gave birth to new life in so many directions.

Among the men of that generation lived George Romney. He was born on the 26th December, 1734, and died on November 15th, 1802. The years of his life coincided with one of the most active periods of our national existence. By the force of his genius he rose to a position which brought him into touch with many of the most eminent men and women of his day. For that reason, as well as for the value of his

work, we look back upon his career with added interest, seeing in his life one of the vital threads that composed the woof of that splendid age. A glance at the names of the persons who sat for him reveals a wonderful diversity of gifts which is at once a tribute to his reputation, and illuminating to anyone who seeks to recall in their fulness the ranks of human life in the eighteenth century. As we review the work of this retiring genius, our curiosity is excited by the discovery that he painted not only so-called pillars of society, but in the course of his quiet life he met with Laurence Sterne, William Cowper, William Blake, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Edmund Gibbon, in the world of letters ; statesmen such as Pitt and Townshend ; preachers and theologians such as John Wesley and Dr. Paley ; Sir Hyde Parker and Admiral Keppel among naval men ; and in the world of science Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles Darwin. These are but a few names chosen at random from the long list of his men sitters. The women he painted offer a list equally fascinating. Reading his life as told by Hayley, his friend, or by John

Romney, his son, we seem to see a pageant of splendid, glittering life passing through his studio and associating with this hypersensitive man, while he, looking upon the virtue and valour, the genius, the wit and the beauty of the age, takes up his brush and paints that stately procession. "History is a pageant and not a philosophy." Not for its intrinsic merit alone, but also for the myriad shifting side-lights flung upon the fleeting three-score years of human existence does the genius of George Romney draw us into the charm of its circle.

George was the son of John Romney,* a builder and cabinet-maker, and of Ann Simpson, his wife. Those who delight to trace the influence of heredity would find pleasure in pondering upon the talents of "honest John Rumney"—as he wrote the name—and the outflow of that genius in his son. The relation between the son's and the father's talent affords a strangely parallel study to that of Mr. Lamb senior and his son

* Sir Herbert Maxwell advances the ingenious suggestion that the name is derived from "Romany" and that the Romneys probably came from a Gipsy stock.

Charles. George underwent a more or less useless schooling at Dalton, and so small was his response to the "humanities" that he came home at the early age of eleven to assist his father in his business. In those early days, when genius was undoubtedly stirring restlessly within him, the boy devoted himself to making fiddles. A passion for music remained with him for life. How often in biography do we find the genius of a man suggesting that, if it had not flowed in one channel, some other course might easily have been found by which it could move towards the ocean of fame.

But the genius of the artist would out. He drew portraits of his father's workmen. One of these men* (all honour to this obscure craftsman !) lent the boy an illus-

* Sam Knight, a working-man who boarded with Mr. Romney. This meritorious patron of the arts, and founder, as he may be called, of the fortunes of our painter, being luckily a man of more than common curiosity, put himself to the expense of taking in a monthly magazine . . . and when Sam Knight had satisfied his hunger and thirst after knowledge, he was in the custom of lending his magazine to his eager inmate George. Knight also lent him a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting*.

trated magazine so that he might copy the engravings. George also made copies from Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*. Another stimulating influence in this early stage of life was the friendship which developed between the young artist and a watchmaker named John Williamson. This man had talents that led him to devote his spare time to the study of natural philosophy, mechanics, alchemy, music, and art. Unfortunately for him the stupid obstinacy and importunity of his wife led her to oppose his studies in every possible manner, and on one occasion with disastrous results. He was engaged in an experiment from which she insisted that he should come to entertain some of her gossiping women acquaintances who had gathered to take refreshment. His furnace exploded, and the results of long research were destroyed. Williamson was a good friend to the boy, and the unhappy married life of the watchmaker so impressed George Romney that, in after years, he used to tell his friend Hayley of the facts, "not without shedding tears of gratitude, in describing his beneficial kindness, and tears of pity for his calamitous fate." Even at

the end of his life, Romney wished to paint a series of pictures illustrating how Williamson's experiments were ruined by the explosion due to his wife's insensate behaviour. Some of Romney's biographers see in this friendship one of the factors that influenced the artist's own attitude towards matrimony; but it is far more probable that his own advance to success rendered the introduction of Mrs. Romney into his circle of society an act totally undesirable both to her and to himself. It is still more probable that, in any case, her practical nature would have warred against the ardent tendencies of his artistic temperament and played havoc with his work. Even the patient and saintly Richard Hooker was disturbed by the ignorant and bustling Joan.

Several people appear to have detected the promise of the boy's genius. Hayley says: "The fortunate chance which led him to a cultivation of the particular art he was destined to profess was simply this. In his youth he observed great singularity of countenance in a stranger at church; his parents, to whom he spoke of it, desired him to describe the person. He seized on a

pencil, and delineated the features from memory with such strength of resemblance as amazed and delighted his affectionate parents." This may or may not be true ; but there were others besides Mr. and Mrs. Romney who perceived that here was no ordinary talent. One of his relatives, Mr. Lewthwaite of Millom, urged John Romney to train his son as an artist. The elder brothers had received a good education, and subsequently did well in life, but this boy, destined to exalt the family name to be an English household word, was still following a blind-alley employment. A Mrs. Gardner,* sister of a tradesman at Lancaster, encouraged George, and the portrait he painted of her was, perhaps, his first serious study ; but, unfortunately, it was not until he was twenty-one, and after the loss of years—a loss from which he suffered all his life and which the student of British Art must always deplore—that he became apprenticed to Edward Steele, a portrait painter.

Meanwhile, apart from the deep and subtle influence of nature, Romney's training

* Mother of Daniel Gardner, later a pupil of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

had been of an haphazard kind, and it does not appear that it changed appreciably for the better under the direction of Steele. One biographer* wisely draws attention to the environment of the artist's younger life, and recalls the scenes that daily attracted his notice and sank into his very nature.

"The Romney homestead stood upon a terrace facing the west and commanding an extensive view of the Irish Sea, while from a hill at the back a wonderful panorama lay unrolled. To the south was the wide Bay of Morecambe, and to the north the estuary of the Duddon.

"On the Cumberland side the high ground was studded with villas and farmhouses, while behind arose the majestic Blackcomb, its lofty head swathed in grey cloud, and in the distance might be seen the pointed summits of Scaw Hill, the Old Man, and Coniston. To the east lay the rich vale of Furness, its woods and meadows encircled by another range of distant mountains."

When we think of genius reared amidst such romantic scenes we realise that, in a

* G. Paston.

different age, and with a different training, this youth with his aerial fancy and delicate sense of form, colour and effect, might have been inspired to paint pictures that would have held enraptured the eyes of all who beheld them—pictures unfolding the inner meaning of Shakespeare's fancy, or Milton's inspiration, as translated by this child of art. But that was not to be. Romney's life was affected by the materialism rather than by the spirituality of the age in which he lived, and, though he beat his wings against the bars, his genius was mainly destined to produce for posterity the form and features of the men and women of his own generation.

George Romney now became the apprentice of Edward Steele, and also the confidant in his master's matrimonial affairs. The excitement attendant upon Steele's rush for Gretna Green told upon Romney, who, as is stated in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1802), "was of an unstable temper, so that the smallest incident of vexation shook his constitution." In his illness he was nursed by his landlady's daughter, Mary Abbott, who had been employed as a domestic servant. An attachment sprang up, and

they became engaged—a situation which again reminds one of Richard Hooker and his unfortunate experience in matrimony. The Abbotts were people of inferior social standing to the Romneys. As Steele had gone to York, he desired his apprentice to join him there as soon as he had recovered from his illness; so, in October, 1756, George and Mary were united before the young artist's departure. One wonders as to the share the good landlady had in this hasty and unwise match.

At York Romney met Laurence Sterne, whose portrait Steele was painting at that time, and the illustrations for *Tristram Shandy* may have been due to this intercourse. Probably Romney knew by sight Dr. Barton (a deformed person with a very large head) who was said locally to have been the original of Dr. Slop. The people of York were accustomed to the appearance of this accoucheur riding mud-spattered astride his tiny pony. Sterne undoubtedly recognised the genius of Steele's apprentice, and it may have been due to this recognition that the master grew jealous, with the result that the two eventually separated. Romney,

after sojourning at Lancaster, returned to his wife at Kendal and set up for himself as a portrait painter. It is worth while noticing that Steele at first kept his apprentice at work grinding pigments, and, perhaps, this practice gave Romney his perfect knowledge of colour mixing; for his earliest pictures show a singular delicacy of tone such as would arise from a deep knowledge of blend and effect.

Although a measure of success attended him locally—he gained the approbation of several influential friends, such as the Stricklands of Sizergh, Jacob Marlow of Copplethwaite, and Colonel Wilson of Abbott Hall*—Romney's one ambition was to try his fortune in London. He was always a rapid worker, and the six guineas which at this period he earned for a whole-length, or two guineas for a three-quarter length, were sums which, if only he had had sufficient pictures, might have enabled him to save up a sum adequate for his purpose. But clients in that remote district were rare;

* Many of Romney's pictures are scattered about the neighbourhood of Kendal, at Sizergh, Dallam Tower, etc.

money came very slowly, while time passed rapidly ; and, at length, he exhibited at the Town Hall, Kendal, his little stock of pictures, oil copies of prints of the Dutch Masters,* two scenes from *King Lear*, and the arrival of Dr. Slop. The total result of his careful saving and the harvest of the lottery at Kendal gave him the sum of £100. Taking £30 of this amount and leaving the residue for his wife and two children, George Romney, at the age of twenty-seven, set out to try his fortune in London. "It is not for man to rest in absolute contentment. He is born to hopes and aspirations as the sparks fly upward : unless he has brutified his nature and quenched his spirit of immortality, which is his portion."

For the purpose of this brief biography it is unnecessary to attempt to trace even the

* Adam Walker, Romney's early and constant friend, showed Blake Romney's first effort at oil painting which he had treasured carefully. It represented a Dutch scene of Boors smoking, and had on the back the words, "This is the first attempt at oil painting by G. Romney." Walker's connection links Romney with Shelley, for this ingenious schoolmaster of Macclesfield lectured, on the advice of Dr. Priestly, at London and Eton, where the young poet attended his lectures.

outlines of Romney's early experience of life in the metropolis. Horace Walpole tells us that in the middle of the eighteenth century there were in England as many as 2,000 portrait painters, and, of course, most of these were settled in London. Who can doubt that this young man passed many a hard day, and often fell a victim to his perpetual foe—depression? He arrived in London in 1762, and, in the following year, made an effort to secure the prize offered by the Society of Arts. The Seven Years' War was nearly over, and, according to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the picture of the *Death of General Wolfe* had been painted before Romney left Kendal. He seems to have been awarded the second prize of fifty guineas, but, owing to the artist's representation of Wolfe wearing silk stockings on the battle-field, and to certain inaccuracies with regard to the regimentals of the soldiers, the Committee reversed its decision, and, awarding the fifty guineas to J. H. Mortimer, gave Romney a consolation prize of twenty-five guineas. Romney's friends held Reynolds as largely responsible for this reversal of judgment. At any rate, Romney

had a suspicion that he owed his failure to Reynolds, whom he regarded as his arch enemy in the matter. To this incident, therefore, can be traced that coldness which, for the future, lay between these two great painters. Sir Joshua would never allude to Romney by name, but always called him, in later times, "The man in Cavendish Square."

Many a great genius has had to endure years of hunger, and disappointment which is worse than hunger, as he treads the thorny path to fame. In his abode, first at Dove Court, near the Mansion House, and later in Bookbinder's Lane,* Romney seems to have rapidly won that measure of fame that gave him the necessary financial support for his schemes.

These included the prospect of a visit to Italy, the Holy Land of Art, the paradise and inspiration of painters. Whereas other men had journeyed thither easily in their youth, Romney was obliged to wait until

* Subsequently Romney resided in Mews Gate, Charing Cross; Gray's Inn; Great Newport Street; 32, Cavendish Square (where he painted so often the charms of Emma Hart); and Holly Bush House, Hampstead.

he was nearly forty years of age for the coveted opportunity. What loss this delay may have meant for the British world of art, we are utterly unable to conceive. Yet, when we read of Romney's pictures selling in recent times for fifty thousand pounds, sincere regret mingles with indignation at the thought of our national methods in dealing with struggling genius. The same age that suffered Chatterton to poison himself allowed Romney with his heaven-sent powers to toil day and night as a portrait painter to keep body and soul together and build up a fund sufficient for the visit to that source from which alone true guidance could be won for greater inspiration and power. We must remember, also, that periodically Romney's erratic brother Peter, also a portrait painter, was a drain upon him, materially embarrassing the financial situation. However, the neglect of Romney's generation was nothing new in our history, and has been too often repeated in later times, so that it is superfluous to comment further upon what Goldsmith discovered so long ago.

After ten years of labour Romney had

achieved a reputation and an income. Already, in 1764, he had visited France, where he had studied in the Orleans Gallery, and become acquainted with Joseph Vernet. His house in Great Newport Street witnessed the throng of London Society now seeking the talent of the man who had become the fashion, even to the detriment of Sir Joshua Reynolds. The support given to the Romney "faction" later on by Lord Thurlow was a great asset in favour of the lesser man ; but already his list of pictures was imposing, and he was sought after by eminent people. However, at this point Romney was ready to risk all—income, the smiles of society, position—in pursuit of his great ideal. His abnormally rapid brush had provided a substantial margin to his income, and from this he drew for his sojourn in Italy. It is impossible for the average man to criticise the life and actions of a genius like Romney. These, to be comprehended, must not be judged from ordinary standpoints.

Just as he was about to start for Italy, in company with Ozias Humphry, the miniature painter, a fever prostrated

Romney for several months ; but at last, in March, 1773, he set out with his friend, taking with him a letter of introduction from Charles Greville, second son of the Earl of Warwick, to his uncle Sir William Hamilton, ambassador at Naples. Of Romney's work in Italy we shall have to speak elsewhere. For the present let it suffice to say that the period of his stay in Rome and elsewhere in Italy saw this man, now approaching middle-age, toiling incessantly, almost tragically, to overtake time and snatch from life those gifts which should have been within his reach twenty years before. It was too late. As we shall see, the visit did, indeed, profoundly affect his subsequent work, but it could not make up for the wasted years. The artist who, it may be, was gifted, *par excellence*, to produce creations of Fancy and portray the facts of History, returned to London, straitened by poverty, forced to free brother Peter from debt, and, as it were, start life anew amid financial embarrassment. Hayley, pausing from the recollections of *Rhymes of Art* by Mr. Shee, the later tenant of the house, tells us that when Romney, at Christmas 1775, took possession

of the house in Cavendish Square, he would wake every morning with a painful apprehension of not finding business sufficient to support him. "These fears," says this poetic biographer (who has more than a touch of certain characteristics of Harold Skimpole) "were only early flutterings of that incipient hypochondriacal disorder which preyed in secret on his comfort during many years." Were they? If so, many another man has suffered from "that incipient hypochondriacal disorder" which the more fortunately situated "literary squire" could not possibly understand.

But the financial clouds soon lifted. The list of sitters henceforth includes not only the names of the fashionable, but also the great and noble of our race. The unfortunate difference between Romney and Reynolds kept the former outside the circle of men who were developing the Royal Academy, and to some extent away from the comfort of royal patronage. Yet his genius supported him in his attitude of aloofness.

The Duke of Richmond sat to him, and so successful was the portrait that at the

nobleman's request Romney painted Admiral Keppel, Mr. Burke, Lord George Lennox, the Hon. Mr. Damer, Lord John Cavendish, and others. In days when royal patronage meant so much he painted Mrs. Fitzherbert. He writes to his son that Prince William has given him a sitting, and, indeed, from these years of his zenith almost till the end, Romney's brilliant genius was fully recognised not only by members of the Royal Family, but by people so diverse in their gifts as Garrick, Sir Hyde Parker, Gibbon, and John Wesley. So far as one can judge from biography, the fault of the estrangement between Romney and Reynolds lay quite as much with the latter as with the former, and was based upon foolish prejudice, dislike and jealousy.

About this time Romney made two friendships which profoundly influenced his life and genius. One, that of William Hayley (a vain, but well-meaning poetaster and literary "squire," who figures so often and so unexpectedly, here and there, in late 18th century life) originated in 1777, and, undoubtedly swayed the great artist for good and for ill to the end of his career ; the

other, begun in 1782 and enduring also till Romney's death, brought to him a source of the deepest and most innocent delight mingled with powerful inspiration. Those who care to do so may trace the career of Amy Lyon, alias Emma Hart, from the position of maidservant up to the time when she figured as the mistress of the Honourable Charles Greville, favourite nephew of Sir William Hamilton.

During this first stage of her life came the period during which she served as a living advertisement to the quack Doctor Graham. He recommended the frequent use of mud baths; and Vestina, or the Goddess of Health, with her hair elaborately dressed with powder, flowers and feathers, and wearing two ropes of pearls on her naked neck and bust, personified Hygeia in Graham's Temple of Health in the Adelphi. She used also to be immersed in the mud bath and the public paid a shilling a head to see the immersion, or, if they pleased, five shillings to view the emersion ! After she had left Graham's service, he gathered the public in Pall Mall by the display and employment of his grand celestial bed, which, fitted with

its electrical apparatus and richly hung, stood upon its glass legs in full public view.

From Greville's protection Emma passed (against her will, and, indeed, without her knowledge) to the possession of his august uncle, and formed then a liaison that ended in matrimony. Their married life—from the days of its association with the author of *Vathek*, William Beckford (who bought Romney's *Indian Woman* to hang in the hall of his fantastic palace-villa at Fonthill), and throughout the glitter of the days of the court at Naples where Nelson came on the scene, right up to the final moment, when, with our greatest sailor holding his hand, and with Lady Hamilton at the bedside, Sir William died at his house in Piccadilly—forms, in conjunction with Emma's former career, an almost fantastic romance. One consideration only was paramount with Romney. To him, an artist, this woman came as a ray of light in a forest, wakening into beauty by its illuminating presence myriad forms of life which before lay unrevealed. Scandal, after the usual fashion, dealt vilely and cruelly with this association. Mrs. Grundy came into life towards the end

of the 18th century, and was born as an adult endowed with maturest powers. The world seems ever waiting for such bait, like some vicious pike in a weedy pool. Yet we have no evidence whatever that Romney's delight in his new sitter was other than that of the artist in an inspiring model, or that his friendship was not akin to a fatherly interest. At the moment of their first meeting he was forty-eight years of age, and she was about nineteen. One thing is certain. Whenever she set foot in his studio Romney's genius blazed into splendour. Just as with many a man before and since, the genius of George Romney was vivified by feminine influence. It may be that a regretful sorrow, due to the difference in their ages and the irksome ties that fettered him, added to the charm of the association. Portraits and sketches followed one another in rapid succession. Commissions were refused; the number of his sitters was reduced that he might absorb himself in his work for his "divine lady." He painted her in a series of studies, as Circe, Alope, Cassandra, Euphrosyne, Joan of Arc, Calypso, the Magdalene, and so on, till her

last portrait—a half-length—just before her marriage in 1791, with Sir William Hamilton. When she left England, depression lowered over the artist's faculties. He painted, and painted powerfully, but a settled gloom lay upon him mentally and physically. When she returned, his soul revived, and then once again inspiration poured through brain and finger-tips. There is no need to attempt to offer explanation. Biography can match the phenomena again and again.

It was during one of his annual visits to Eartham, in Sussex, the residence of William Hayley, that George Romney met William Cowper. Cowper and Hayley were drawn together by the resolve of certain men in those days to edit Milton's works. Hayley had been engaged by Alderman Boydell to write Milton's life. Cowper had also been mentioned as a possible author, and Hayley was distressed to think that he might enter into rivalry with William Cowper. He sent the poet a sonnet, visited him at Weston in 1791, and Cowper returned the visit the next year—coming thus into the group of remarkable people, such as Gibbon, Thurlow, Flaxman, Miss Seward, Romney, and Blake,

who were in the habit of visiting William Hayley at Eartham. Undoubtedly Hayley possessed amiable qualities. For Cowper and Romney, mind was attracted by mind and bent by bent. These two men found many similarities in each other. Romney was susceptible to feminine attraction and sympathy ; so, perhaps, quite as much was Cowper. The artist was inspired to work by the loveliness of Emma Hart ; the poet wrote under the inspiration of Theodora, his cousin ; Mrs. Unwin, the youthful widow who mothered him ; or of Lady Austen, the charming, sprightly guest at Olney. Both men suffered alike from deep mental depression. Romney was now experiencing, by reason of approaching age and the fierce flames of mental and spiritual ardour, the darkness of a despair which Cowper had, to his cost, known periodically from childhood. Romney's picture of Cowper and Cowper's sonnet to Romney signify the manner in which these two artists met each other.

The decline of Romney's powers dates from the moment of Emma Hamilton's departure. In the year 1791, the symptoms increased and developed. There were

periods of revival. Rest and change produced temporary recovery ; but extravagant schemes for pictures designed upon a huge scale and his wild fancy for planning an enormous house are symptomatic of disease.

Intermingled with such fits were depression, irritation, and gloom* which suggest the triumphal emergence of mental forces that in their pre-natal stage had given rise to the haunting pathos one finds in the original portrait painted by himself. His son persuaded him to be content with the purchase of a house on Holly Bush Hill, Hampstead. The house in Cavendish Square was leased to Mr. Archer Shee, then rising into fame. A visit to Eartham, in 1796, caused a renewal of energy ; but in the following two years the cloud of despondency settled finally, never to be lifted.

Oppressed with failing sight, numbness of the hands, and a continual dizziness, the giant (by reason of his tremendous aptitude for work as well as for his genius, one thinks of him as a giant) relinquished the struggle

* See the quotation from *The Gentleman's Magazine* on page 11 of this book.

to return to Mary Romney, who for so many years had been content to watch supinely her husband's splendid career. As we have no wish to dilate upon the subject of their separation, it is as well to state once and for all the impression that a modern reader gathers from the material at his disposal. All Romney's biographers deal with the subject; some at length, others more briefly; some with sympathy born of compassion; others with outspoken harshness due to lack of understanding.

We believe that Mary Romney acquiesced in the wise separation that left her husband free to follow the relentless call of genius. Year by year he continued to contribute a generous sum for the upkeep of his family; he visited the north from time to time; he was in constant correspondence with his son, John Romney, who in order to rectify Hayley's biography* wrote subsequently

* Hayley commissioned William Blake while he was at Felpham to collect the material for this life and to trace all the scattered pictures. Blake's correspondence with Hayley shows that his heart was in the work and throws much light upon the question of the possession of the pictures at that time.

such a sympathetic account of his father's life. Mrs. Romney realised, no doubt, that she was in every respect unqualified to support her part in the unequal partnership. Their marriage had been hurried, altogether unwise, and at the period of uncomprehending youth.

To anyone who has striven to understand the inner life and temperament of George Romney, the vulgar and ignorant outcry against his association with Emma Hart brings a sense of heaviness and sadness. Beauty to him was as essential as the sunlight to the flower. He was as God made him. The word-picture of Romney, "listening to the twanging of Hayley's lyre, and turning a deaf ear to the cry of the poor woman fading and pining away, alone and deserted in the north," is as ludicrous as it is unjust and untrue. From Tennyson down to the author just quoted* all such over-zealous searchers for immoral causes are frequently wrong in their suspicions, and still more flagrantly wrong in their interpretation of the man and his art. One wishes

* Dutton Cook in 'Romney and his Paintings' in *Once a Week*, xvii., pp. 228, 260 (August, 1867).

sincerely that the great Poet Laureate had not so abused his powers as to pen the false sentiment that breathes throughout "Romney's Remorse." The tone of the poem rings falsely; the argument is based upon as culpable a biography as was ever written.*

Why should Tennyson pounce upon Romney and pass by Shakespeare, whose behaviour was equally open to criticism? The answer is that even Victorian prudery dared not assail the greater name. We much prefer the words of a feminine biographer with reference to George Romney:† "And now we come to the closing lines in the memoir of George Romney. The aim has been to tell the story of his life as he lived it: and though we miss the homely figure of the north-country wife from the scenes where poets reigned, there is no incident that proves that it was otherwise than agreeable to her. She may never have desired to join him in London. To do so in those days meant the

* "One of the most tiresome books ever written in memory of an eminent man" (*Ward & Roberts*, p. 55).

† Hilda Gamlin: *George Romney and his Art*.

severance of accustomed friendships dearer than any attraction that could be offered from an untried world. She is said to have been a woman of great good sense, and, no doubt, had an instinctive dread that she would be out of her sphere in an element of learning that surrounded her husband. She and their only living child were well provided for by him, and the link of affection was unbroken, though they lived so far apart."

At any rate, the "poor woman in the north" faded and pined away so very slowly that she lived to the age of ninety-six, dying in 1823, and surviving her husband by twenty-one years. It is stated that an aged servant who died fairly recently remembered the old lady well, and asserted that her temper was bad. Let us pass by the separation, and see the return of the artist, and Mary Romney bending to the task of soothing her husband's last years. In his letter of December, 1800, George Romney says to Lady Hamilton, "I feel every day greater need of care and attention, and here I experience them in the highest degree."

The return of his brother James, who held the rank of Colonel in the East India Com-

pany's Service, failed to rouse George Romney from the mental coma into which he had now sunk. With a brother's love he had yearned for this re-union, but now that it was fulfilled he failed to recognise the object of a life's affection. After a long and earnest gaze he "burst into an agony of tears," and lapsed into complete insensibility to all around him. He passed away on the 15th November, 1802, having reached the age of sixty-eight years.

The best concerted schemes men lay for fame
Die fast away ; only themselves die faster.

He lies buried in the churchyard of Dalton, his native town. John Romney wished to raise a monument in the church to the memory of the great artist, but Lord George Cavendish, the lay rector, refused to grant permission. The monument was transferred to Kendal, where Romney had breathed his last. As we have seen, Mrs. Romney died at the age of ninety-six, in April, 1823. Sir Herbert Maxwell safely conjectures that "hers was not the fiery temperament that swiftly consumes its mortal envelope."

* * * * *

To this brief biography of George Romney it is necessary to add a few remarks as to his appearance, character, and disposition. Tall, with dark hair, and broad strong features, his eyes denoting a spirituality and power behind them, the artist appears to have been capable of persistent and intensive labour, and, through his exalted genius, of developing the intellect that had suffered so much from lack of early education. Inheriting his father's ability, he felt drawn to art rather than to music, and he found his true happiness in the expression of his thought, feeling, and sentiment in his wonderful pictures. He was an affable and tactful friend with qualities that won for him the deep affection of men like Cowper, Blake, Adam Walker, Ozias Humphry, Cumberland. They all loved him, and the last-mentioned says that "envy never drew a word from his lips in disparagement of a contemporary." Lord Chancellor Thurlow and Gibbon the historian, in a different category, held him in high esteem. One even seems to hear in the words of the aged John Wesley a tone of more than admiration as he speaks of the artist and his powers.

Romney's pitying and generous nature prompted him to love children and they in return loved him—a splendid tribute ! None but a lover of children would have been vouchsafed the shy yet trusting gaze with which his portraits of them greet us, as the living children themselves greeted him. None but an inspired painter of children could have devised a method all his own to transfer the naïve directness of that gaze to his canvas, the single brush-stroke of warm colour that forms the shadow of the lashless upper eyelid, a device that is well seen in the portrait of a *Lady and Child* in the National Gallery, or in the charming picture of the eight-year-old *Miss Casson*, painted in 1781, and lately re-discovered by Mr. Kaines Smith.* The same generosity led him to pour out money like water to alleviate material troubles, as, for example, when he paid £200 to save his landlord at Pineapple

* This picture, which the Diary shows to have been painted on the 15th, 19th, 21st and 22nd April, 1781, and which is described as a three-quarter-length in the Rough Lists of John Romney, is entered without further description in the *Catalogue Raisonné* of Ward & Roberts. It is now reproduced for the first time by kind permission of Mrs. F. Davies, the owner.



W. F. Davies

Miss Casson
GEORGE ROMNEY

Court, Kilburn, from financial disaster. He lived in seclusion ; with the exception of Reynolds he appears to have had no enemies ; he loved to help those of his calling who were less successful than himself ; he walked along the path of life, seeing and loving the glories of nature, himself a simple child of nature, and was content to devote himself to humble imitations of nature's beauty. All his days he lived worthily as the son of the man who had won for himself the noble title of "honest John Romney."

Unspoiled by success, attentive, while his faculties remained, to the exacting claims of his dear mistress, Art, somewhat timid and nervous in his humble attitude towards life as a whole, unable, except at moments when he was deeply stirred, to express himself as befittingly in words as he could in colour, Romney, apart from his own temperament, seems to have suffered two great hardships in life—one, the necessity imposed upon him of perpetually dealing with sitters instead of ranging fancy-free in the glory of the spiritual realm ; and the other, that at the time of his death no true and sympathetic account of his career was

given forthwith to the world, but that his first biography^s was spoken by the irresponsible, clacking tongue of the phrase-hunter, William Hayley.

CHAPTER II.

TRAINING AND ASSOCIATION WITH ARTISTS.

ROMNEY'S portrait of himself represents a man on whose face the vital characteristics are written by the soul within. We are aware of a certain peevishness that seems to blend with every other quality, spreading over the features to such a degree that one asks oneself whether the tendency was inborn, or whether the incidents of life developed this dominant trait.

We are all likely to err in an attempt to form a personal estimate of ourselves ; and at first our thought suggests that Romney read into his character what seemed to him to be the prevalent mood of his life. But the man was not simply an ordinary reader of character and a student of physiognomy ; he was pre-eminently an artist ; and such a prejudice on the part of his judgment would most certainly be corrected by the pene-

tration of the artist's vision. To stand before a portrait of a great artist painted by himself is either to behold a candid revelation on the part of the workman, or else to behold a deliberate, conscious concealment of unpleasant or weak elements in the face. In such a portrait, the artist takes almost the standpoint of God, who "looketh not as man looketh," for, in this instance, he knows the soul behind the face ; he sees the heart as distinct from the form ; the subject of the picture is the most vital to him of all subjects ; for it is himself.

One feels before this portrait that Romney gives us honestly and deliberately himself, and the beholder prefers to judge the man from his personal estimate, before he trusts to the unintentional deception of the printed page. In this respect Romney is fortunate where others are doomed unheard to condemnation. Whatever man may say of him, here, at least, is his character, written, as it were, by his own hand, and accordingly one draws nearer to this unfinished record to read anew the man and his life as it showed when eight-and-forty years had definitely set their mark upon brow, and mouth, and eye.

The mouth and eyes tell most. The former seems almost to smile at the spectator, suggesting a fund of humour and pleasantry. The eyes check the impression given by the mouth, and rouse a sense of sympathy, even of pity, in one who looks deeply into them. Under their arched and somewhat projecting brows, they are the very doorway to the soul within, but they speak to us of no peaceful, restful inner realm. They seem actually to suggest the dark years to come—and to tell plainly of a dreamland far removed from the hard and material age in which this artist moved. The hair above the high and spacious brow is still plentiful, with a tendency to curl, but a hint of greyness proclaims full maturity.

The firm, full chin denotes strength of purpose ; yet the mouth is not resolute, but rather whimsical, with laughter not far away. One begins to inquire, "Where, then, does this peevishness lie?" There can be no doubt that it hovers around the lips and mouth. A sense of duality arises from them. One can imagine an April mood within. Certain little lines, shades, hints, speak of a

prevalent mood, hidden at present by playfulness, but ready to break forth. In life his face must have resembled in its changefulness the surface of one of Romney's mountain meres.

Such is a reading of Romney's face, and the student bears it in mind as he traces the hesitating steps of the biographers of the past. The face, somehow, haunts one with its wistfulness, its dream, and its friendliness. If only one could have known the man and have questioned him ! Just as with Charles Lamb, to whom we have referred somewhere earlier in this book, so with Romney, it is the life in the eye that attracts and holds. Surely those eyes, when living, possessed a wonderful power and depth. One desires earnestly that some contemporary of Romney's would speak of the message that sped triumphant from the soul within the gaze to the very hearts of his associates. One readily accepts the statement that in company with friends he would sit long, absorbed in thought, absent from all around him, till, starting suddenly from his seat, he would give vent to effusions of fancy, and harangue upon the subject of his

art with a sublimity of idea and a peculiarity of expressive language entirely his own, but in which education and reading had no share. On such occasions he held his audience enrapt, as, in a hurried accent and an elevated tone, with tears starting from his eyes, he poured out sallies of natural and unaffected genius.

As we have seen, Romney missed the advantages of early education. We repeat, very deliberately, advantages rather than disadvantages, for it would appear that all through his life there was a world of fantasy within him that lacked expression. His pictures, indeed, attract the beholder, but to the student of human nature his one picture of himself makes a greater appeal with its sad suggestion of that realm of imagination lying behind the artist's eyes. His consciousness of his early lack of education kept him from the tables of the great with the exception of Lord Thurlow's, for the Lord Chancellor and old schoolfellow of William Cowper, knowing the greatness of the heart as well as the talent of his friend, and, honouring Romney with his particular notice, most probably exercised befitting

tact. John Flaxman tells us that "a peculiar shyness kept him from association with all public bodies, and led to the pursuit of his studies in retirement and solitude which allowed him more time for observation, reflection, and the exercise of his skill in other arts connected with his own. And, indeed, few artists since the fifteenth century have been able to do so much in so many branches ; for, besides his beautiful compositions,—pictures which have added to the knowledge and celebrity of the English School, he modelled like a sculptor, carved ornaments in wood with great delicacy, and could make an architectural design in a fine taste, as well as construct every part of the building."

Here then was a man who was ready to leave all and follow art simply for art's sake, a man who sought to draw from the sources of inspiration within himself rather than from the sources that lay without. However, so intricate is human life that even the most exclusive member of society cannot stand entirely alone. George Romney's existence seems to be a protest against conventionality : and yet it is but one of the

many threads that go to form the general pattern of the age to which he belonged. Still, in his case it is the more difficult to assign to this or that influence in his life any special feature of his art. It seems beyond question that, up to the age of twenty-one, his bent had free and entirely unrestrained control, seeking its sustenance from the splendid natural world around him, copying from Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*, and responding to the encouragement of discerning but unqualified friendly criticism. After his apprenticeship to Steele, in March, 1755, it would seem that he but exchanged unrestricted liberty for a "studio drudgery," which was useful for its lessons of persistent application and all that he learned of the mixing of pigments. If the story of Laurence Sterne's admiration of young Romney's talent were true (it was reported by Cumberland, but denied by Hayley), one might readily infer that already the apprentice displayed a talent but little likely to profit by the instructions of an ordinary master. But the brief association between Steele and Romney, cannot, to say the least, have been of great benefit to the young genius,

and its termination left him again unaided, but free to carry on his work as a portrait painter at Lancaster. In that town his talent won the sympathy and appreciation of certain influential local people, especially of Mr. Walter Strickland of Sizergh, who not only employed him to paint family portraits, but also permitted him to range at liberty among his collection of pictures.

At this period Romney set himself to copy from a series of prints after the Dutch masters, and it was from the sum realised by the raffling of these oil copies and pasticci, some twenty in all, including two scenes from *King Lear* and one from *Tristram Shandy*, that the young man was able to build up his slender savings to the sum of one hundred pounds.

Is it an exaggeration to say that, up to this point in his life, George Romney stands before us as an artist who, remote from great art collections and the great works of art, set himself the responsible task of self-tuition? Yet, in the circumstances of his life, what else could have been the case? Until the days of Reynolds there was in England no school of painting; and the

only inducement likely to bring artists to these shores was the profit to be gained from portrait-painting. The art of landscape-painting came comparatively late in the day. If Romney had been reared in London he would have lost the quiet, but long-enduring lessons of nature in her wildest, loveliest moods, and what could London have offered him in nature's place? Even Sir Joshua Reynolds' earlier life offers but a similar sort of training to Romney's, different as his associations chanced to be. We find the young Reynolds copying Guercino, becoming apprenticed to Thomas Hudson, quarrelling with and leaving his master. It was not until he was twenty-six years of age that his meeting with Commodore Keppel gave Joshua Reynolds that opportunity to travel which he employed so diligently and effectively.

Romney left the North for London when he was about twenty-eight years of age. Reynolds returned to London from Italy when he was twenty-nine. The comparison is entirely to the disadvantage of Romney in the matter of opportunity. While he had been struggling to save the little sum necessary for the support of his family and

himself, the artist whom he was destined to rival had flourished amid the sunshine of the glorious, leisured life of Italy, with all her stores of wealth in art and culture. Now, almost contemporaneously, they settled in London. How different in status ! Reynolds in Sir James Thornhill's old house in St. Martin's Lane, and acquainted with those who could, at his request, open up aristocratic society for him ; Romney, possessed of his little fraction of the £100, and with but two friends in the whole of London—both north-countrymen, Mr. Braithwaite, of the Post Office, and Mr. Greene, an attorney at Gray's Inn. How amazingly does Romney's talent triumph in these conditions ! One thinks of the youthful Shakespeare in lowly capacity at a London Theatre, and the University Wits ; one recalls the contemporary figure of Oliver Goldsmith, and the coldness of an indifferent society. Then one turns to see Romney toiling for ten long years before he can go to visit that sunny land which held so much his genius longed to behold and study at first-hand.

Those ten years witnessed unremitting

toil at portrait-painting, but they provided very slight means of study save that which could be snatched from labour necessary for life's needs. Charles Lamb tells us that he was chained to "the desk's dead wood." Romney exclaims to Hayley: "This cursed portrait-painting. How I am shackled with it."* Yet, in 1760 London witnessed the first public exhibition by British artists in the rooms of the Society of Arts in the Strand; the next year there were two exhibitions—one at the Society of Arts, afterwards enrolled as the Free Society of Arts, the other at Spring Gardens, and known later as the Incorporated Society of Artists. London could at least offer Romney a view of contemporary art, and his journey to Paris, in September, 1764, enabled him to visit exhibitions and see the art treasures of palaces and churches—in short, all those places where he could study the old masters.

* He must, however, have had ample opportunity of experiencing the "joy of others" at his power displayed through this cursed art. Richard Cumberland, the playwright, was so delighted with his portrait, that he wrote verses extolling Romney's praise. Dr. Johnson praised these verses and told Reynolds—probably not to his pleasure—that the poem would bring Romney's name before the public.

Having free access to the Orleans gallery, he passed much of his time there, being greatly delighted with the pictures of Le Sueur. Six brief weeks of freedom, with the first real chance of his life to study where he pleased ! He was now about thirty years of age.*

"Romney, shy, retiring, studious and contemplative, conscious of all the disadvantages of a stinted education, of a habit naturally hypochondriac, with aspen nerves that every breath could ruffle, was at once in art the rival and in nature the contrast of Sir Joshua." These are the words of Richard Cumberland,† one of Romney's first patrons—a man who gave him ten guineas

*As we shall see elsewhere, his opinion of contemporary French art was far from high. "The taste for painting and the art itself are at the lowest ebb ; simplicity they call vulgar, and pure elegance passes for gravity and heaviness. Everything must be done with the air of a dancer or an actor. . . . They are a people that have no idea of simplicity, and are totally devoid of character and feeling." He instances their degeneracy by their indifference to the great masters of the past.

† Richard Cumberland figures in Sheridan's *Critic* as Sir Fretful Plagiary. He was suspected of being the person who hissed at Tony Lumpkin just as Goldsmith was entering at the fifth act of *She Stoops to Conquer*.



National Portrait Gallery

Richard Cumberland

George Romney

instead of the desired eight for a three-quarter portrait, took Garrick to see it, and won from Garrick, the great friend of Reynolds, praise and sympathetic advice. One thinks of Romney's face in that portrait of himself, and believes that much of what Cumberland says is true ; but one misses in the description at least three features—the iron determination underlying the artist's lips, the delicate winsome humour that plays so lightly on those lips, and the dream world in those haunting eyes. The Society of Arts awarded him a consolation prize for *The Death of General Wolfe*, giving the first and second prizes to other competitors deemed more worthy. It is clear that seven years before this Romney had his ideas of Reynolds' work ; for he says in a letter written when he was twenty-three and offering criticism upon his own critics : “ The first sort that presents itself are those who, having, perhaps, read some flimsy French authors on taste, heard of Hogarth's line of beauty, and seen a few of Reynolds' prints, condemn all pictures that are not twisted, loose and careless.” Now, he suspects Reynolds of influencing the judges

in their decision, and for ever afterwards these two are separated, and their respective followers are the devotees of the one or the other. "All the town," said Lord Thurlow, "is divided into two factions, the Reynolds and the Romney, and I am of the Romney faction."

In Romney one finds a sturdy British independence. There appears to be no necessity to seek for ill-will either on the side of Reynolds, or of Romney. Aloofness, divergence of view, opposition of personality—these may have been, and probably were, factors in the lack of fellowship; but if one were obliged to seek for the reason for the marked aversion, it would be to Romney one would turn first rather than to Reynolds. There is a quality in certain Celtic temperaments that would gladly accompany its possessor to the gutter and death before it would yield one iota in the way of admiring inferiority, or bend the knee to position and rank. It is quite possible that Romney possessed that quality, which many a man possesses even in these latter days. But, if that were so, it is reasonable to suppose that, over and above such a bias, he had views of

his own with regard to art, and was determined to uphold his opinion even though by so doing he shut himself off from royal patronage and the favour of the great. Persistently he refused to send his pictures to the Royal Academy, and it was not until 1871 that any of his work was exhibited by that august body.

Was this the petulance of "a weak, ill-balanced and over-emotional man"? Was it due to the advice of the meddling Hayley? A man may suffer perpetually from the pen of a biographer. Every discriminating person knows that accurate, honest, and candid biography, more commonly met with nowadays than formerly, has been one of the rarest things to find in our literature. Again, one claims that the explanation of Romney's attitude would appear to be more easily found written upon his portrait than within the covers of the biographies of Hayley, or of John Romney. The man who, in matrimony, took that decided step which left his life free for the pursuit of Art was certainly no weakling; and at the age of thirty-five he divorced himself from the little group of influential

men who might have furthered his material interests. Almost at the same period of his life he relinquished his practice, and, giving up all, went to Italy to study art for art's sake. One feels grateful to him for leaving a standard whereby we may check the judgments of those biographers who actually knew him in the flesh, as well as of the many who have drawn more or less from those original contributions. If the unfinished portrait of himself, by himself, may be accepted as a true and definite representation of his physiognomy, one asserts, with confidence, that the word "weak" may be ruled out from any account of this painter's temperament.

"Mr. Romney was the maker of his own fortune and, inasmuch as he allowed himself not sufficient leisure to execute many designs which the fertility of his genius conceived, may be said so far to have been more attentive to that than to his fame. Whilst his mind was pregnant with magnificent ideas, and his rooms and passages loaded with unfinished portraits, he had not resolution to turn away a newcomer. . . . If, therefore, it was the love of gain that

operated on him upon these occasions, it was a principle that counteracted its own object ; but there was also a weakness in his nature that could never make a stand against importunity of any sort ; he was a man of a most gentle temper, with most irritable nerves. He was constantly projecting great undertakings for the honour of his art, and at the same time involving himself in new engagements to render them impracticable.”*

In this brief extract from an obscure source we get the text for the remaining years of this great painter's life. We may in all fairness repudiate the love of money for money's sake ; we may, all the more readily, seize upon the statement that his mind was pregnant with magnificent ideas—most of which never came to birth.

Here was a man who made his own fortune. At the age of thirty-eight he left his already lucrative position of a fashionable painter, wholly abandoned the field to his rivals, and spent three years—from the autumn of 1772 to the winter of 1775—

* *Lancashire Biographical History, Some Account of George Romney.*

seeking true guidance and genuine inspiration from the heart of Italy. So far as we can judge, it was just the same in Italy as elsewhere. He studied, lived in seclusion, and worked closely at his copies of the Masters, being profoundly inspired by antique sculpture. His diligence knew no intermission. He was aware that he lacked style ; he had hitherto toiled for a livelihood. These three years must have fled all too rapidly, but they fed his nature, corrected his views of art, fostered the innate world of fancy while at the same time they developed and refined his taste. For the future he determined to try to achieve grandeur and simplicity. Mr. William Roberts, answering Mr. Justice Darling, said : " I prefer the earlier period part after Romney came back from Italy. I think the earlier period much more attractive than the later period because it is more spontaneous. I regard the period soon after he came back from Italy as Romney's best period."*

Impressions received in early life endure ; the experience of later life sows seeds that

* *The Cult of Old Paintings and the Romney Case* :
R. W. Lloyd, p. 180.

strike no deep root. If Romney had visited Italy in the early twenties of his life, we should have had in him a genius capable of giving far more than portraits of his contemporaries. If Romney had lived in the following century, we should possess, in all probability, splendid traces of his fertile imagination. As it was, he returned from Italy to rival Reynolds, but was unable to find the true outlet for his transcendent conceptions. "A child of nature who had never seen or heard of anything that could kindle his genius, or urge him to emulation, and who became a painter without a prototype"—he seems to have owed but little to association with his confrères, but much to the heaven-sent gift within him. We are struck, as we follow his life, at the display of true taste and judgment which were not brought to him by education but by the genius that guided his destiny. Time after time he turns to the pages of Shakespeare and Milton to find in those great thinkers and singers the talisman that shall unlock his own genius and liberate the mute imprisoned pageant which yearned to trace its passage over the canvas. If he had been

free to follow fancy, he would gladly have escaped from the necessity of making money. But he was utterly unbusinesslike, and, moreover, his attempts along the lines of pure imagination were sporadic and desultory. Yet a cursory glance at the subjects of his many pictures will show how frequently he made an effort to leave convention and develop originality; an examination of the pictures themselves, whenever one gets the good fortune to see such works, suggests powerfully the presence of a genius that might have been transcendent in realms of powerful imaginative conception. Romney's ability to depict airy lightness comes out, perhaps, most clearly in the beautiful group of the Gower children, and this portrait, by reason of its arcadian charm and ease, also exemplifies the debt he owed to the lessons he learned from Italy. In his encouragement of Boydell's attempt to establish an English School of Historical Painting we see his deep desire to do work of this nature; and it was not Romney's fault that the fiery outbreak of the French Revolution hopelessly destroyed the scheme. As it was, in the

days before the great revival of interest in Shakespeare's works, this artist gave the world his rendering of *The Tempest*, *Shakespeare Nursed by Tragedy and Comedy*, and *The Infant Shakespeare Attended by the Passions*.

The thought of Romney working to interpret Shakespeare's plays strangely fascinates the mind. We have elsewhere drawn a parallel between the Elizabethan dramatist and the Georgian artist. Each came from a remote country district, each wrestled, Jacob-like, with fortune, and achieved fame ; each left wife and children at the call of destiny. The parallel grows more striking when Romney passed under the compelling influence of Emma Hart, afterwards Lady Hamilton. One thinks of Mary Fitton and of the impenetrable mystery of the sonnets. The Elizabethan poet and the Georgian painter both felt the incentive that so often stirs man to employ his ripest powers of genius. In all probability W. E. Henley has come as near to the true explanation of affairs as it is possible for us to arrive when he says in his *Century of Artists*, " The dominant note in Romney's

life is one of sexual tragedy. The worship in paint which he professes for Emma Lyon is comparable of its kind and in its degree with that which Dante practised for Beatrice in poetry. That he was not materially her lover is suggested by the fact that he never tires of painting her. The triumphant male does not commonly disperse his energies in celebrating the peculiarities of his conquest. There have been examples to the contrary, of course ; but good taste, good feeling, the instinct of sex, the necessities of art, are generally on the other side, and for one such outcry of full-fed satisfaction and delight as, say, Rossetti's *Nuptial Sleep* (which may or may not be genuine) there are a thousand such voicings of mere desire, as, say, *Adelaida* and Romney's *Lady Hamilton passim*."

It was in July of the year 1782, when Romney was forty-eight years of age, that the Honourable Charles Greville, the nephew of Sir William Hamilton, brought his mistress Emma Hart (née Amy Lyon) to sit for the artist. A new planet swam into his ken, and for the future, as long as reason reigned supreme, this woman (when they met, only a girl of about nineteen) was Romney's

"divine lady," and the very centre of his inspiration.

If you get simple beauty, and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents.

Artists, poets, musicians, people of rank and fortune, men of influence, vied with one another to celebrate her beauty.* Romney, on his part, set aside orders and commissions in order to study and express the charms that his delicate and observing taste so clearly discovered and idealized. All the vulgar and unjust calumny of the world that has been cast around this association is aspersion utterly devoid of fact. Like Shakespeare, like thousands of lesser men, Romney, the artist, had found a grace that opened before his eyes avenues along which his genius could wander towards its paradise, and he took the path with joy and ecstasy. Not one of his pictures of this beauty affords the slightest suggestion of indelicacy: and how much less valuable would be Romney's offering to his country without the pictures of Emma Hart?

In the ten years from 1775 to 1785, that

* Ward & Roberts' *Romney: A Catalogue Raisonné*.

is to say, in the years following his visit to Italy, and especially the exercise upon him of Correggio's influence, the brush of Romney was employed upon the portraits of the most famous people of England—fair women, statesmen, divines, men of eminence in their professions. He was earning in a twelve-month the sum of four thousand pounds, but he was dissatisfied. It was at this very period that he referred to "this cursed portrait painting." Probably he felt that the powers within him were circumscribed by the limitation of portraiture, a mere chronicle of the faces of men and women around him. He carped at the very means which achieved his fame and which have brought down to our own day the memory of his genius—a genius whose true value is yet to be estimated. For there are those who feel that Romney's work has not as yet won the full recognition of which it is worthy.

From the year 1782 onwards he felt the comfort of the inspiration that flowed from the grace and beauty of Emma Hart. When he lost her temporarily in 1791 he was exceedingly depressed. But the sunlight returned. "Since she has resumed her

former kindness, my health and spirits are quite recovered." So much did his happiness depend upon the exercise of his artistic faculties. Cowper, in his Sonnet to Romney, bears testimony to an important fact—that Romney does not merely represent a form and semblance, but reveals personal character in his portraits :

Not the form alone
And semblance, but, however faintly shown,
The mind's impression, too, on every face.

But not all his visits to Hayley's home at Eartham, the society of eminent clients, treasured friends, kindred spirits such as Cowper, the promise of young and talented life as in the case of Flaxman,* who took a lodging in London "in the neighbourhood of our dear Romney," neither success nor failure could arrest the definite decline that had clearly set in by these years; though there are instances of his work at this time which show no decline, as, for example, his *Milton* of 1792.

* Flaxman said, "I always remember Mr. Romney's notice of my boyish years and productions with gratitude; his original and striking conversation, his masterly, grand, and feeling compositions are continually before me, and I still feel the benefits of his acquaintance and recommendation."

The death of Reynolds in 1792, leaving Romney as it did the foremost place among contemporary British artists, stimulated him to further effort. In the following year he wrote to his brother to say that his health was not constant, that his nerves gave way, and that he had no time to go in quest of pleasure to prevent decline of health. He adds that his hands are full, and that "I shall regret the necessity of forbearing to take new faces. There is a delight in the novelty greater than in the profit gained by sending them home finished, but it must be done."

In the overleaping ambition of his later years, vast schemes as impossible of realisation as the plan of Chaucer for the *Canterbury Tales*, or of Spenser for the *Faerie Queene*, we see more than mere unconsidered ambition. What is hinted at, in that portrait of himself, of germs that might take root and grow, was by this time becoming manifest. It has been asserted that he was reflected in the picture painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee* as a "restless egotist con-

* There is a reproduction of this picture in *Putnam's Monthly* and *The Critic*, vol. 2 for April-Sept., 1907, p. 517.

tinually hardened to the sufferings he did not behold, selfish increasingly, and increasingly desponding, passing now into an old age not much to be respected—his sharpened features shaped into a scowl of bitterness, certainly of complete disappointment."

This estimate of the last few frail years may be just or unjust. We usually prefer to judge the man or woman in maturity, and not when the fruit has passed beyond that stage. His later letters point to remaining grace in his temperament, and the amiable qualities which so endeared him to his friends surely could not entirely disappear "while yet the taper glowed." We need not stop to consider the point, for with the decline of his powers there naturally ceased any permanent influence from without; his ideas conceived upon so vast a scale were just extravagant schemes impossible of achievement and destined never to be completed.

In Romney we see what Richard Cumberland described as "the master of his own fortune," and, so far as we can judge from this appreciation of Romney by his dis-

criminating friend, in spite of the subsequent neglect which befell Romney, there seems to have been also a real understanding by many people in his own lifetime of the artist's greatness, although, curiously enough, as we have said, the student finds even then an unwillingness to make any definite attempt to estimate the extent of that greatness. "He was a man too great to be consigned to oblivion; but the task of doing justice to his abilities is not a light one. . . . It is not the annals of the man, but the discussion of his art that constitutes the difficulty; the events of his life are soon told; but the emanation of his genius should be traced with precision, and that demands both knowledge of his work and acquaintance with his art."*

* *Memoirs of Mr. George Romney*, by Richard Cumberland, in *The European Magazine*, vol. 43. (June, 1803).

CHAPTER III.

STYLE, DEVELOPMENT, CHARACTERISTICS.

THE student of Romney finds a decided interest in examining the opinions of writers upon this great artist. Probably in no other instance is there more diffidence in the expression of opinion. Even the most enthusiastic of his supporters introduce saving clauses, which, in the event of a change of public opinion, shall excuse the writer from having unreservedly lavished praise upon the subject of his pen.

We have mentioned elsewhere the warm praise conferred upon Romney by one or two of his contemporaries ; the reader is aware of the indifference with which his work was regarded earlier in the 19th century ; and most of us have an idea of the large prices fetched in modern days by those same pictures. In 1805, Long, "the artistic surgeon," purchased the picture of *Lady*

Hamilton as Circe for a trifle over £15. He "improved" the work by painting into the background two wolves and a panther; yet, in 1888, this "improved" work of art sold for over four thousand pounds—a larger sum than the artist, quick though he was with his brush, earned at his best period in a whole year. It is quite easy to calculate Romney's fame in money terms. In 1807 his portrait of *Mr. John Lowther* sold for 5s.; in 1913 *Anne, Lady de la Pole* fetched the sum of £20,370. In the Hamilton Palace Sale of 1919 a Romney portrait of *The Misses Beckford* realised the astounding sum of 52,000 guineas.

If we apply this test of sales we find a steady rise in his prices from the 'fifties of last century onward to our own day. The *Daily Telegraph* of 4th February, 1922, tells how a man at a sale in Whitehaven bought three portraits for less than a sovereign. Two were by Tilly Kettle, "an inoffensive eighteenth-century portrait painter," the third, unframed, was of a boy and girl, and bore no artist's name. Forty years later a local artist persuaded the owner to send this unframed canvas to Christie's. It was



National Gallery

Mr. and Mrs. William Lindow

George Romney

acclaimed as a Romney and fetched the price of £6,500 guineas. Even the Kettle sold for 205 guineas, and thus "Romney's fame wreathed itself enhancingly around the shade of his contemporary."

The attitude of the critics has been constant in its divided nature. During Romney's life John Flaxman, R.A., and Thomas Phillips, R.A., were both eulogistic, the former warmly so, the latter more impartially and perhaps with sounder judgment. Richard Cumberland was clearly aware of his friend's greatness, but was quite at a loss to express fully his reasons for his opinions. However, his estimate of Romney, although the shortest of the three biographies that appeared soon after the artist's death, is by far the most reliable and most free from prejudice. Horace Walpole, who cherished no especial love for Reynolds, and might presumably have leaned towards Romney, only refers to him once or twice in his wonderful letters, and evidently did not hold him in high esteem. Passing over the long period of neglect which, although it speaks for itself, is partly explained in the next chapter of this book, we arrive at the

nineteenth century, only to find a similar disparity in the estimates of modern critics upon the man's works. There is the same unwillingness to blame thoroughly, or praise outright, the same inclination to safeguard against the possibility of a future revulsion of feeling. Either we have not yet arrived at a true estimate of George Romney's work (which indeed seems to be the more likely state of affairs) or else the sum total of his virtues is to be culled from the criticism that blows so hot and so cold around his reputation.

Still, it would appear that the ordinary individual, free from prejudice and simply aware that a picture pleases or displeases, and unaware, perhaps, of preconceived notions derived from former schools of thought and judgment, has consistently taken Romney into favour. In the artist's lifetime this class was formed by the sitters, and their friends and acquaintances who saw the portraits; in our days it is composed of the larger class of that public which, in recent years, owing to the institution and development of art galleries and collections, is slowly but surely forming its

own judgment, irrespective, to a very large degree, of the opinion of the critic, or of those little circles of cunning art dealers, who, for the sake of enhancing sale values, employ those skilled in the task to write up the work of certain men with a view to profit. One of Romney's sitters said : " I fancy I called up my good looks to-day : where they came from I don't know, but my picture is certainly much improved. All seem satisfied with it. I have reason to be, for it is handsomer than ever I was in my life." The artist, with delicate subtlety, had clothed his sitter with a " beauty " which won her good opinion, and also that of her friends. The writer, looking at one of Romney's pictures in the Tate Gallery, overheard a bystander remark that, in his opinion, the comparison between Romney and Reynolds, with regard to the two pictures concerned, was in every respect in favour of Romney, in form, expression, colour effect, and the laying on of the pigments. Where, at present, is any critic who would be so bold as to advance such a claim in the world of art ?

In what essentials does this popularity of

Romney consist, and what is it about his style, development, and characteristics that has achieved a success which one of the greatest writers upon Romney declares has given him not only a hold upon our own generation, but one which will continue as long as our art endures? These are no easy questions to answer. In reality they were the unexpressed questions that lay in Richard Cumberland's mind when he wrote from his heart the contributions which he felt were demanded by the death of his friend.

We may safely assume that Romney's development underwent a rapid growth during his visit to Italy. We have tried to show how serious were the limitations of his art up to that point, when, by his own industry, he was enabled to indulge himself in the satisfaction of that deep craving of his soul—to see the masters of art at first-hand. If we consider his age at the time of his visit, it would, at first sight, appear a tremendous omission to ignore all that he had painted previously ; but while we need not ignore, nor in the least neglect such work, yet so lamentably had his genius suffered for

want of training and culture that it is only fair to Romney himself to judge him mainly by the work that left his hands after the expansion of his views of art due to his journey to Italy. His previous attempts had been the outcome of pure genius ; his subsequent works show that same primordial genius restrained and enhanced by the accepted canons of art. Thomas Phillips, in the old days, and Mr. Roberts, in recent times, both refer to the excellence of the work done by Romney in the ten years after his sojourn in Italy. " The purity and perfection of ancient sculpture appear to have made the deepest impression upon his mind ; and he afterwards assiduously cherished the taste he then imbibed. . . . Hence grandeur and simplicity became the principal objects of his ambition ; he perceived these qualities distinctly, and employed them judiciously, even whilst imitating nature in his most usual occupation—portrait painting."*

From the outset Romney had worked directly from nature, with the small excep-

* Thomas Phillips, in A. B. Chamberlain's *George Romney*, p. 374.

tion of his attempts at copying from old masters, which we have noted elsewhere. The purple distances of the splendid landscape that lay about him in his infancy and youth, the ever-changing surface of the lakes, the pageant of the wide sky, in short, all the charms of nature in her most splendid moods, wrought their effect into his soul. Again, throughout his life, he painted direct from the human form, and his pictures are the representation of an artist whose inspiration worked unchecked and unrestrained up to the time of his visit to Italy. The change that is noticeable after that period of close and intensive study is all in the direction of a more studied grace, and beauty, and feeling for colour. His tendency to rebel against the convention of dress and fashion is more displayed in the drapery of his female figures.* In the letters written as he went out to Italy he commented somewhat curiously upon what he describes as the degeneracy of French taste and the failure of the contemporary

* See, however, *Essays on Art* by John Hoppner, R.A., who states that Romney's draperies are more suitable for sculpture than painted portraits.

French School to absorb the best from the Italian masters. He was welcomed in France by Joseph Vernet, who took him to the Louvre ; but the remark referred to shows that Romney knew but little of the development of French art in the earlier part of his own century, of the work of Bonchardin and Pigalle in sculpture, of Gabriel in architecture, of the work of the Sèvres factory, of Boucher and the Gobelins, of Greuze, of Nattier. He preferred Le Sueur to Watteau.* In Italy he studied for long periods the work of Vandyck, Paul Veronese, Correggio ; he wrote from Bologna on the work of Caracci ; at Venice he came under the sway of Titian ; again at Parma he renewed his deep interest in Correggio. But there is no doubt that he also looked at art from the point of view of the sculptor. Accordingly his later pictures do not simply speak of a deeper knowledge of colour and colour effects ; they tell as plainly of changed methods of production ; they announce Romney's taste in his selection of those adornments which, from

* Ward and Roberts: *Romney : A Catalogue Raisonné.*

his point of view, shall most strikingly reveal and illustrate the charm of his subject. It has been pointed out that, apart from portrait painting, his compositions exemplify his endeavour to attain simplicity, expressed in dignified and beautiful character, while, at the same time, nature shall stand forth in lively guise. His study of Grecian sculpture is blended, therefore, with art, and thus his tendency to devote his spare time to the other arts cognate with painting told constantly upon his production.

The public, in viewing one of Romney's pictures, is not concerned so much with standards of art, and cares but little for the terms of the critic. To the ordinary person Romney appeals, and, it would appear, will continue to appeal, because his emotion is manifested through the grace of his art. Romney, like Laurence Sterne and Fanny Burney, lived in the age of sentiment : and precisely as that age with all its inclination is revealed through certain forms of literature, so in this great artist the sway of sentiment is shown in feature as well as in form. Hayley tells how Romney's lips quivered with emotions of pity at the sight of distress,

or at the relation of a pathetic story. Cumberland narrates that Romney was prone to tears. Elsewhere we learn how this silent, retiring man would, at times, when deeply stirred by some remark in the conversation of his friends, depart from his usual habit of silence, and, like Charles Lamb on certain marked occasions, pour forth in his own striking and natural phraseology an eloquence and knowledge which not only surprised and astonished his hearers, but held them spellbound at this manifestation of a power which generally lay concealed. Sentiment was the talisman that unlocked the stores of wealth within Romney's heart and soul. D. S. MacColl has said that "a new face set Romney no new problem."* By this he probably means that as a rule Romney was not concerned to read the revelation of character in the lineaments of the pictures his sitters brought to him. He was simply concerned with his feminine sitters in capturing what the face might offer of beauty and grace. It has been charmingly suggested that the reason for this was that

* *Saturday Review*, June 9th, 1900.

he was in love with loveliness, and that he found his inspiration in

The witchery of eyes, the grace that tips
The inexpressible *douceur* of the lips.

This witchery and this grace he found in women and children ; he gave it to the world in such pictures as that of *Lady Sligo*, *Lady Bell Hamilton*, and, perhaps, especially in the delicate and joyous innocence that almost is felt breathing from the portrait of *The Gower Children*.

Was it something more than mere accident that brought into Romney's life, at a time when his conceptions of beauty had undergone such transformation, the charm and fascination of Emma Hart? There is no doubt that Romney was one of those silent men who can better express by action than by word the working of the heart and brain ; but like such men he probably felt more deeply because of the want of adequate and appropriate language to relieve the sway of inward passion and storm. He had missed early culture and education. His letters tell very plainly what had been his deprivation in this respect. Yet, although language was mute, feeling was dominant. Once, at least,

he speaks in tones that unmistakably translate the mood within. As he was about to leave Rome he visited Mount Viterbo to catch the glory of the city of the Seven Hills, and his words reveal clearly the depths within: "My affections began to revive, and something hung about my heart that felt like sorrow which continued to increase till I reached the summit of Mount Viterbo. I arrived there about half an hour before the Vetturino; indeed, I had hastened to do so, as well knowing it would be the last time I should see Rome. I looked with an eager eye to discover that divine place. It was enveloped in a light vapour, as if the rays of Apollo shone with greater lustre there than at any other spot on this terrestrial globe. My mind visited every place, and thought of everything that had given me pleasure, and I continued some time in that state with a thousand tender sensations playing around my heart, till I was almost lost in sorrow — think, O think, my dear Carter, where you are, and do not let the sweets of that divine place escape from you; do not leave a stone unturned that is classical, do not leave a form

unsought that is beautiful, nor even a line of the great Michael Angelo."

With such an insight into this man's heart of hearts, one cannot wonder that the critic finds that Romney was sensitive to a greater degree than Reynolds and Gainsborough to the pure grace of line, but was more frequently preoccupied with a refined consciousness of womanly beauty, only a little less meretricious than the beauty sought after by Greuze. "Lacking as he did the consummate technical skill of these two great masters (*i.e.*, Reynolds and Gainsborough), he yet had the gift of seizing and fixing on his canvas that strange evanescent spirit of female beauty, that *Fata Morgana* of painting, which greater artists than Romney have seen, but failed to secure."* "His draperies are noticeable for exceeding beauty, but it is the beauty of sweet simplicity, and of a simplicity not painfully sought for, but quickly found. There is admirable grace in the easy concord of those large folds. It had not been the aim of Gainsborough; it was beyond Reynolds;

* Lionel Cust in *The Magazine of Art*.

its inspiration was more from Greece than from Rome. The drapery was not gorgeous, but slender and severe, even in all the exquisiteness of its flow ; its folds scanty rather than voluminous ; it answered so to Flaxman's ideal, and his ideal was the highest. His art deals neither with the subtleties of intellectual character, nor with the tasks of minutely imitative painting, and in characterizing it the first word to be used is grace, and almost the last is grace."*

Upon this sensitive spirit, this being, able to quiver with emotion, and before these discerning eyes, there came the form of a woman whose beauty of face and lines of form appealed to every artist and poet who beheld her. To Romney's sentimental nature there appeared at this juncture the very embodiment of this sentiment. To this man who was in love with loveliness, was revealed, in the flesh, perfection of feminine form and beauty. If his ordinary woman-sitter found her beauty strangely and subtly enhanced and refined, as his brush portrayed her charms upon his canvas,

* Frederick Wedmore, quoted by A. B. Chamberlain in *George Romney*.

what would this "divine lady" find in his representations of her contour, carriage, and gesture? It matters not, indeed, what she found: it is rather what her admirer and worshipper discovered and portrayed. Romney may have lacked concentration; he may have frittered away his genius upon a host of ill-conceived projects; he may have cried out upon "this cursed portrait painting." In all probability, through the utter deficiency of his early training, the world has lost some of its greatest pictures; but the Sublime and the Beautiful of a sentimental age have been caught and handed down to us by this artist of sentiment. We may never see these pictures of Emma Hart collected and grouped together in one place; the world has apparently lost that opportunity; but, if it were possible to do so, one would then see the culmination of this great painter's work along the lines on which it was destined to reach its highest form.

It is interesting enough at this point to seek for confirmation of Romney's view with regard to Emma Hart's beauty and grace. We are told that she proved to be a moving

spirit with contemporary artists and poets ; but anyone who wishes may read more definitely the effect she produced upon certain powerful minds and intellects at the close of the eighteenth century.* Other artists than Romney painted her portrait, although Lord R. Gower estimates that George Romney painted her a hundred times. Goethe, passing from Rome to Sicily, says that Tischbein, the German artist, is at work upon her portrait, and then, with manifest delight the poet describes her qualities and the joy he has in her presence. "She exhibits every possible variety of posture, expression, and love, so that at last the spectator almost fancies it a dream." . . . "One beholds her in perfection, in movements, in ravishing variety, all that the greatest of artists have rejoiced to be able to produce." Later on Goethe calls her a most beautiful wife, "a masterpiece of the great artist nature." Other writers bear similar testimony. Lord R. Gower gives reproductions of two representations of her—one by the famous Italian Rega ; the

* Article in *The Anglo-Saxon Review*, Vol. VI. (by Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower).

other (found by Lord R. Gower in Rome) by an unknown artist. Gower adds : " Of all the women who may be termed historical beauties Emma Hart was the most beautiful. Emma has the admiration of Romney, the great Sir Joshua, Thomas Lawrence, and Goethe.

Without any intention of departmentalising Romney's work, it is possible for us to divide the time of his artistic output into three main periods, with a fourth during which his genius struggled even more ineffectively to free itself from the gathering clouds of his malady. Throughout these periods his talent flowed persistently, but while the earlier years, up to the visit to Rome, reveal his native genius, yet, during that visit, and for about ten years afterwards, his work was clearly improved and broadened by the impressions he received from Italian sources, while in the third period the beauty of Emma held him in thralldom—a thralldom which resulted in those wonderful portraits which reveal his divine subject in so many entrancing aspects. " She could be arch, innocent, seductive, and simple ; a child, and a coquette, angel, and wanton." What



Lady Hamilton as "Emma"
Lord A. de Rothschild
J. H. G. G. G. G.

ever title he gave to the picture, *Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante*, *Lady Hamilton as Naiure*, whether she figures as Mirth, as Ariadne, as St. Cecilia, or a sempstress, out of the portrait steals the inspiration that caught his genius and translated it into these superb creations. For Romney, at least, feminine beauty became personified, and passed from being a mere haunting, baffling, impossible dream, a dazzling will-o'-the-wisp, into the face and form of a real and living woman—Galatea, as it were, stepped from the realm of the imagination. He had painted, and was to paint, the portraits of the great and noble. He was never so engrossed as when he was employed in figuring the grace and beauty of high-born and delicate women ; but now, like the prophet's rod, the super-charm of this ideal sitter swallowed all his other admirations, for grace was added to grace, and beauty to beauty. There can be no doubt whatever that in the portrait of Emma, Lady Hamilton, we have the consummation of Romney's art. That there are outstanding exceptions nobody would care to deny. Among his earlier work we may single out, for example, *The*

Parson's Daughter ; from his later achievements *The Margravine of Anspach* ; but the very soul of his power is depicted in the "refined lusciousness" of his goddess in art.

Pictures appeal in various ways : it is often a matter of individual choice which is to be selected as the "best" of a man's work, but possibly few of Romney's pictures would appeal more than his *Nun*.* Kneeling before the figure of a saint, just where the light falls strongly on her upturned face, with her hands lying crossed across her breast, the Nun lifts pleading eyes towards Heaven. Over her loosened hair flows a veil that offers a contrast with those dark locks, and in its delicacy almost merges with the purity of the light and the whiteness of the bosom. Although it is suggested, the full beauty of the contour of the lower limbs is partly lost in the folds of the dark gown. But for two reasons the picture seems remarkable ; firstly, in that it offers more especially an exquisite rendering of the perfect beauty of that oval face with all its latent womanliness, and, secondly, for the

* Messrs. Ward and Roberts say that the Nun does not represent Emma Hart.

flood of light which falls not only on the face and breast of the suppliant, but also upon the delicate sculpture, and sweet petals of flowers in the vases on the ledge, and partly, also, on a basket of roses on the floor. One thinks of a later picture, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, and sees in this eighteenth-century masterpiece a figure of a very human woman, passionately real, but spiritually transcendent in her perfect pose amid that pure white glow of ecstatic radiance. We find the same representation of an oval face in other pictures, notably in that which shows Lady Hamilton sitting with her hands lightly finger-tipped together on her knees, dressed in a simple, light dress with a full ample skirt, and wearing a Pamela hat tilted negligently upon unbound hair which flows gracefully over her shoulders. But in this very different study one misses the wonder of the lustrous eyes ; for in the picture of Emma the face is bent downwards as though the sitter were lost in tender reflection, and the fringed lids hide those twin worlds of tender mystery.

It may be that some day the world will receive, as a compensation for its inability

to visit Romney's superb productions grouped together in one place, a series of good reproductions of the third and most splendid phase of his power ; for a careful study of these pictures would enable the student more definitely to understand and reverence this master's complex gifts. In pose and expression, in robe and drapery, in the arrangement of lock and tress, whether lying loose or rippling beneath hat or veil, in the display of the attractions of face and figure, mouth demure or roguish in its witchery, showing the white teeth between the parted lips, in dimple of cheek or arm, we have nothing in our masters which approaches these sympathetic interpretations of what Romney saw in his "divine lady." It is all so delicate, so winsome, so sweetly pure, and yet so truthfully human, that the student of these pictures is brought close, very close, into communion with the artist and his subject, and seems to have known them both personally, to have heard them discuss the details which were to produce these glories of our art, to have cherished an affection for them as though their lives were bound up with our own. So

attractive is the theme that in a short work like this the danger lies in its receiving too much notice ; yet, from one point of view, these pictures do, indeed, stand out as special representatives of Romney's work. Part of his genius at least lies in this discrimination and capture of the beauty of Emma Hart.

As a portrait painter Romney stands or falls. We can judge him completely only from that one pronounced feature of his work. It is, of course, impossible to trace out thoroughly in any short volume the full extent and development of such work of his as we possess, from the early, small full-length portrait of *Jacob Morland*, which may be cited as a type of his work prior to his coming to London, and, indeed, the first portrait he ever painted, to the head of *William Gay*, painted in 1796, which won "at its first sight" the heart of William Cowper, while the artist himself said "that he had never examined any manly features which he would sooner choose for a model, if he had occasion to represent the compassionate benignity of our Saviour." The reader may be referred to the second book in Appendix II. of this volume (*Romney: A*

Critical Essay, by Messrs. Ward & Roberts) for an idea of the scope of the material that offers itself for study and comment. But, in tracing the course of Romney's activities as an artist, it is equally impossible to neglect certain other features of his work which bring themselves to the notice of the student, while, in another section (Part IV.), it will be desirable to refer to the remarkable charm of his brushwork, which wins the admiration of the beholder.

The backgrounds of Romney's pictures, if fully dealt with, would afford much material for discussion and conjecture. In his portrait of *Lord Thurlow* one sees a group of trees in rich foliage, while, through the trunks, lies a glimpse of water, and, rising above the topmost branches, the twin spires of a church. *Mrs. Maxwell*, in a long, loose, white robe, gathered by a sash round the waist, stands leaning her left arm lightly upon a stone pillar. Behind her are the trunks of birch trees, and, in the background, lies a glade leading to the verdure of a hill-slope. In *Jacob Morland's* picture we see an open landscape beyond the figure; there is a ragged rock against which a dog stands,



National Gallery

Jacob Morland of Capplethwaite
George Romney

beautifully outlined, while the mountains of the Lake District die away in the distance. The portrait of the dog in this picture has been justly praised for its representation of characteristic sagacity and its appearance of reality. A lovely landscape is more than hinted at in the portrait of *Mrs. Nathaniel Lee Acton*. We have referred to the sculptured niche and the vases of flowers in the picture of *The Nun*. In his portrait of *Master Pelham* there occurs an example of Romney's rapid painting which also illustrates his power to depict natural objects. A brace of partridges was painted in about half an hour. At first sight these seem a piece of slovenly slap-dash work, "but when seen at a proper distance deception becomes so perfect that one might go and try to pick them up." Again and again Romney's pictures seem to cry almost pathetically, 'Even if this wonderful portrait were removed, with all its charm of feature and splendid reproduction of dress, of robe or suit or uniform, the craft of the painter would hold you with a power which he feels he possesses, but is not at liberty fully to reveal.' So much is displayed that the

thought arises that, if Romney had lived in an age of landscape painters, he might have found a greater fame than that he has won as a portrait painter. There seems no doubt of the knowledge of his power. Probably the strength of his appeal comes out more than elsewhere in the background of the portrait of *Mrs. Mingay*.

But his outcry against "this cursed portrait painting" gathers pathos in the reflection that Romney undoubtedly possessed other powers as an artist, and did, indeed, struggle at times to express the inspiration within him. The *Life* by Hayley, or by his son, discloses the fact that the artist's mind was full of conception. To what extent he drew from his own reading or upon the suggestions of friends for ideas, the student must decide for himself. One recalls Lord Chancellor Thurlow's cry, who is reported to have said: "Romney, before you paint Shakespeare, do for God's sake read him!"

There is no room to exemplify fully this statement, but we may refer to one or two facts. In 1770 Romney sent two pictures to the Incorporated Society of Artists to illus-

trate *Mirth* and *Melancholy*,* the themes of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. John Romney says: "These pictures had great merit." Later in life he is unable to accept an invitation to visit Hayley at Eastbourne, because "I am now set in for study. I have made a large composition for Milton, and I wish to keep my mind fixed to that work as much as possible." His generous work in connection with Boydell's scheme for a "Shakespeare Gallery" illustrates his strong leaning to the call of the genius of the great dramatist. John Romney declared that the idea of the scheme originated from his father. *The Infant Shakespeare Nursed by Tragedy and Comedy; The Infant Shakespeare Attended by Nature and the Passions*, might easily have been suggested by the reading of Thomas Gray's ode, *The Progress of Poesy*.†

* Dorothy Bland (or Jordan), the most beautiful actress of the day, sat for *Mirth*.

† the dauntless child
Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smil'd.
"This pencil take" (she said), "whose colours clear
Richly paint the vernal years:
Thine, too, these golden keys, immortal Boy!
This can unlock the gates of Joy,
Of horror that, and thrilling fears,
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears."

The rendering of Hayley's son Tom as *Robin Goodfellow* is as clearly produced by the music of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Towards the end of his career, when obsession seemed to sweep giant projects like vast clouds across his intellect, he writes to Hayley as follows : " I had formed a plan of painting the Seven Ages, and also the Visions of Adam with the Angel, to bring in the Flood, and the opening of the Ark, which would make six large pictures (but this is a profound secret). Indeed, to tell you the truth, I have made designs for all the pictures, and very grand subjects they are. I beg no human creature may have a hint of it. My plan was, if I should live and retain my senses and sight, to paint six other subjects for Milton : three where Satan is his hero, and three of Adam and Eve. Perhaps six of each. I have ideas of them all, and I may say sketches ; but alas ! I cannot begin anything for one year or two, and if my name was mentioned I should hear nothing but abuse, and that I cannot bear. This has always been my enemy. My nerves are too weak for supporting anything in public." Among

other pieces of his work Romney attempted some illustrations of Percy's *Reliques*.

There is no necessity to draw attention to the merits or demerits of such work of the artist. Suffice it to say that throughout his life he was possessed of pregnant ideas, and throughout his life claims upon him made it obligatory that he should earn money by his art. Added to these facts is one other of deep significance, that he lacked, clearly lacked, the knowledge and training which should have been his in the early decades of his life. And this is the fact that critics, with a lack of sympathy, have occasionally passed over with cruel silence. Had it not been for these hard limitations Romney might have left a different record. There is that in his work—a delicacy, a hint at beauty, an imagination of a sublime order—which leaves the mind charged with the thought that here was an artist who could have interpreted great themes, and put to canvas delicate and masterly representations or some of the absorbing topics of our literature, not to speak of facts in the realm of History.

It is a hard fate that a painter or a poet

is obliged to live in a state of warfare and jostling. One recalls Hayley's story of the fortunate circumstance of Romney's boyhood. Fortunate or not, it was the deciding factor that separated him from the world of dream and wonder, and plunged him irrevocably into the brilliant society which he persistently depicted. In London his sitters asked, "Have you ever been in France, Mr. Romney?" or "Have you ever studied in Rome?" And his very art in portrait painting made it essential that he should pursue his craft in order to develop his resources, so that he might answer such questions in the affirmative. Thus we see this giant caught in the toils, constantly struggling to break loose, but only gaining his liberty when his divine strength was exhausted, and the silver cord was well-nigh snapped. In a sense, scarcely any other life of an artist can offer such a tragedy, at once so poignant, so continued, and so suggestive of national loss.

One striking feature of Romney's life deserves close consideration. That is his fatal tendency to begin and then to leave uncompleted, pictures prompted by his

conception. Many an hour of the very prime of his life was spent by Romney, who worked indefatigably—even by candle-light—at inceptive works which, for one reason or another, were tossed aside. For instance, in his *Tragedy and Comedy Nursing Shakespeare*, *The Infant Shakespeare Attended by the Passions*, and *The Alope*, his model had been the child of a soldier in the Guards. The child died while these pictures were being produced; accordingly the pictures remained unfinished. For a similar reason the *Group of Children in a Boat drifted out to Sea* was abandoned. The errand boy who served for his model in the *Shepherd Boy Asleep Watched by his Dog at the Approach of a Thunderstorm* was dismissed for ill-behaviour, and the picture was never completed. The *Girl Mourning over her Fawn just Killed by Lightning* was thrown aside, although near completion, because the artist had no fawn from which to paint. Similarly, the absence of a goat in *The Milk-pail overturned by a She-Goat anxious to approach its Kid which a Milking-Girl is Fondling* was sufficient to account for the unfinished piece. “I could enumerate many

other unfinished fancy pieces," says his son, "in all stages of progress, which, from divers impeding causes, were suffered to accumulate in every corner of the house : no picture was set aside from any difficulty in the art itself. I could also mention several causes which contributed to produce the vast heap of unfinished portraits that obstructed the progress to his gallery. The chief were the poverty or meanness of the parties to whom the pictures belonged. I have known ladies' portraits, amounting in value to a thousand guineas, remain unfinished for many months for want of a model with fine hands and arms. . . . It was no uncommon circumstance, too, that, a *chère amie* having been brought to sit for her portrait, both she and the picture were deserted before the latter was finished."

With regard to one portrait, at least, delay fortunately was crowned by completion. Lady Newdigate came to London in the summer of 1790. Romney desired that she should dress in white "sattin" with a long train to the dress. She wrote to her husband, "It is ye oddest thing I ever knew, but I dare not disobey him as you are not

here to support me." After two years this life-size full-length was still unfinished ; but eventually the artist gave the world the picture which was so much admired by George Eliot and which is described by her in *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*. " The elder lady is tall and looks taller because of her powdered hair, which is turned back over a toupee and surmounted by lace ribbons. She is nearly 50, but her complexion is still fresh and beautiful with the beauty of an auburn blonde ; her proud pouting lips, and her head thrown backward give an impression of hauteur which is not contradicted by her grey eyes." It was Lady Newdigate who fancied she called up her good looks one day for Romney, although where they came from she could not say, but her picture was certainly improved.

Again and again in his life we read of pictures being started and then neglected. The haunting demon of nervous dejection, the fears that ever dogged his path, the cruel goads that drove him along the road he knew he must tread but hated treading, the very loftiness of his conceptions, all these made war upon him. It has been

suggested that we have so few of his pictures which reflect, by reason of composition, the manners and customs of society, simply because Garrick, in 1768, was taken by Cumberland to see Romney, and had his attention caught by a large family piece. A gentleman in a close buckled bob-wig and a scarlet waistcoat laced with gold, with his wife and children (some sitting, some standing) had taken possession of some yards of canvas, very much, as it appeared, to their own satisfaction, for they were perfectly amused in a contented abstention from all thought or action. Said Garrick: "Upon my word, sir, this is a very regular, well-ordered family, and that is a very bright mahogany table at which that motherly good lady is sitting; and this worthy gentleman in the scarlet waistcoat is doubtless a very excellent subject (to the State, I mean, if these are all his children), but not for your art, Mr. Romney, if you mean to pursue it with that success which I hope will attend you." This picture was turned with its face to the wall, Romney's natural feeling for good grouping was checked, and such pictures as that which he and his son

discovered at Barfield in 1798 were for the future unlikely. This picture "represents a party consisting of three gentlemen and two ladies going on board a boat on a lake. The ladies show great timidity, so natural to the female character under the impression of danger, which expression is frequently accompanied by a certain degree of grace, but are politely urged by their attendant gallants. The colouring is beautifully clear, and as fresh as if recently painted. The execution evinces great facility and freedom of handling, and the touches are spirited and neat." This appears to have been one of the pictures exhibited in the Town Hall at Kendal and purchased by lottery when Romney was struggling to pay his way to London.

Dr. Johnson called Reynolds the most invulnerable of men ; on the other hand we may regard Romney's feelings, when exposed to harsh criticism, as easily ruffled as the surface of open water upon which the rough north wind rushes to break up all placidity.

We shall speak elsewhere of the charm and delicacy of his brushwork and the smoothness of his canvas. So far we have simply traced the characteristics of his work, and to

go further would involve more elaborate explanation and wider reference.

In 1789, when Wesley was eighty-six years old, he said : " At the earnest desire of Mrs. T., I once more sat for my picture. Mr. Romney is a painter, indeed ! He struck off an exact likeness at once, and did more in an hour than Sir Joshua did in ten."

Grace, simplicity, conscientiousness, classicism (after his return from Italy), sentiment—but, above all, elegance and grace, seem to be the characteristics of George Romney's art. So far he is too little known to be truly estimated ; but it may be that in the fulness of time the world of art will not so readily assign him the third place among the portrait painters of the eighteenth century. Two of them have so long been accepted as the leaders that it seems heresy to suggest their displacement ; yet the wheel of judgment is ever revolving, in art more especially, and later generations may accept Wesley's statement and, saying, " Mr. Romney is a painter, indeed," assign their preference in a similar manner for this hitherto but little understood artist.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUALITY OF THE ARTIST.

WHILE it may be comparatively easy to say of certain artists that they were influenced by this or that school of painting, or fell under the sway of one or the other of the great masters ; while we can follow out by means of memoirs or biography the evidences of contemporary opinion with regard to a Sir Joshua Reynolds or a Turner, yet when we apply these considerations to George Romney we are met with difficulties that mark him out for special treatment. This is largely due to the fact that he was a recluse. Reynolds, for example, figures here and there in the social and political life of his day. He possessed influential friends who could spread his praise abroad. Contemporary opinion plays freely and flatteringly around his name. As President of the Royal Academy he was surrounded by

satellites who caught and reflected lustre, and, in their orbits, spread the glory of his name from pole to pole. The public, which after all is the determining factor of a man's reputation, saw the works of Reynolds in the Academy and conferred upon him (no doubt under the coaxing guidance of the skilled critic) the just praise which the pictures merited. But in almost every respect Romney seems to fail us when we search for contemporary judgment. He moves almost like a shadow across the years in which he lived, leaving not a trace behind. The reason for this lies partly in his own temperament, and partly in the circumstances of his life. We suppose that only those who have missed early opportunities, and, awakening to the fact in later life, endeavour strenuously to make good what ought to have been accomplished in childhood and youth, can realise the manner in which the intercourse and social activities usually common to manhood and maturity are shut off from such a life. The very fact that Romney stood outside the Academy meant far more than such an attitude would imply in later times. It meant that while

the great public knew intimately the work of Reynolds and Gainsborough, for example, Romney was unknown. Royalty, which exercised so great a power in those days, might smile upon his genius, but he would not know it. This quiet man, whose sole recreation was to employ his spare hours in studying the sister arts to painting, or to work by candle-light at the designs and conceptions prompted by his fruitful imagination, merely joined in later life a small club called "The Unincreasables," and formed with contemporary artists no intimate association except with John Flaxman, whom he berriended so magnanimously, and a few of the men who became his pupils. Yet this was the man who numbered among his sitters six of the members of Pitt's Administration, including the Prime Minister himself; who, notoriously aloof from Sir Joshua Reynolds, so attracted people to his canvas that we find one after the other of the great Johnsonian Circle, of which Reynolds was so conspicuous a member, coming to sit for their portraits—Johnson himself,* Burke,

* The portrait of Johnson in Trinity College, Oxford, is attributed to Romney.

Garrick, Goldsmith,* and Gibbon. Starting in 1776 Romney kept a diary of his sitters and continued it till 1795. Messrs. Ward and Roberts, in their excellent volumes on Romney, give these sittings, printed in three columns to a page. Estimating these sittings, which occupy fifty pages, at 230 to a page, we find that spread over these nineteen years there were, roughly speaking, between eleven thousand and twelve thousand sittings—"an amazing mass of work." Romney spared himself in no way. Sometimes he would receive five or six sitters a day, and, working only too rapidly, he usually finished a portrait in three or four sittings. As we have shown, included among these sitters were the *élite* of the society of those days. But it would seem that as a man Romney made no impressions upon this fashionable and influential group of people. They came to him because they realised his powers, and desired to employ him for their own purpose—they regarded the artist rather as a portrait painter than as a man, and,

* This portrait was exhibited at an exhibition of Old Masters in 1877 as a Reynolds, but experts held that it was a Romney.

when they left his studio, they were done with him ; some to such a degree that they did not even pay for the work he had accomplished !

When Reynolds passed away there were those who could hand on the story of his life and labours ; when Romney died the task of biography fell, unfortunately, to the pen of one better able to talk about himself than about the artist. Reynolds' pictures were seen exhibited in public places ; Romney's pictures were scattered here and there about the kingdom, hidden for the most part in private houses and country mansions, and the nation little knew, or even yet knows, its heavy loss and its splendid gain.

There is no doubt whatever that Romney's temperament was a difficult one for people to get to know and understand. Ozias Humphry was a great friend of his, and accompanied him to Rome, but they separated, Romney to plunge into the studies which he had come to Italy to prosecute. It is said that his ruling passion was ambition to succeed. There are different pathways to fame. It often happens, how-

ever, in this world, that the portal to fame is more easily found in the halls of the great and powerful than in the study or the studio. Romney refused, for reasons best known to himself, to seek greatness by facile speech or flattering tongue. To some extent later generations have justified his attitude ; it may be justified even more definitely by our posterity. But it is evident that his aloofness led to an absence of sympathetic public opinion, and that, so far as contemporary art was concerned, we may infer with some probability of fairness that he exerted but little influence upon its development. Furthermore, for nearly fifty years after his death his genius lay under an undeserved obscurity, and was only revealed in its full brightness when Ruskin began to preach the virtue of the Pre-Raphaélite.

It may be argued that, while Romney was most unfortunate in his loss of early training, he was nevertheless happy in coming to London when he did. We may deplore the fact that he did not live later ; it is certainly well that he did not live earlier. His wonderful gift of portrait painting suited his age and the social life of the latter half of the

eighteenth century. George the Second had not loved "boetry" nor "bainting;" his æsthetic tastes were employed in other directions; but his grandson, George the Third, displayed sympathy towards the arts, while Sir Joshua Reynolds had, by his consummate genius, drawn the attention of society to the development of British Art. The stream of fashionable folk who sat for Reynolds and Romney shows how society had come to view the artist. We believe that this fact had much to do with Romney's attitude toward art and with the attitude of the public towards him as an artist. In painting, as well as in poetry, there is a sort of idealised realism, and very many people are attracted consciously, or unconsciously, by the glamour thrown by the artist, whether he paint with brush or with pen, over the subject of his art. As Browning says through the mouth of Fra Lippo Lippi:

For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First, when we see them painted, things we have
 passed
Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see;
And so they're better, painted—better to us
Which is the same thing, art was given for that.

That is true of most people; it is more

true that the eclectic art of the painter and poet often transforms the unattractive and presents, as it were, an etherealised view which captures admiration. Juvenal may exclaim : *Quid prodest . . . pictosque ostendere vultus majorum*. The ancestors and the descendants glory in a presentation that pays a compliment to their line. It may be partly true that there are grounds for the criticism mildly urged against Romney to the effect that there is a certain sameness in his faces, that the blue eyes of one portrait shine like the eyes of another ; or as D. S. MacColl* puts it : " He merely moved the parts of the mask a little about so that the features by their spacing might approach to a ' likeness ' and that there is, as it were, a sort of conformation to type." As we shall see, the criticism can be met with another suggestion : that a generation of portrait lovers was pleased to find a man who could flatter so subtly, and it admired his flattery. Hence the " amazing mass of work " from his brush. He discovered in Italy the grace with which he clothed his

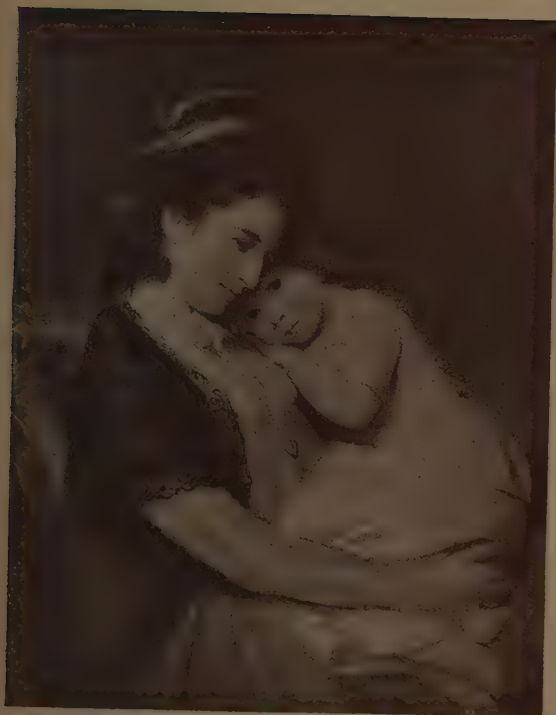
* *Saturday Review*, June 9th, 1900.

later portraits, and, upon his return from the sunny south, the "stiff and formal painter of Newport Street developed into the free and charming painter of Cavendish Square." The public recognised the alteration and was quick to take full advantage of his skill.

Yet while that generation rejoiced in the subtle flattery of Romney's art, and we love the winsome charms displayed in his feminine faces, we must recollect that this great artist^t did more than flatter, which, after all, is a fault (if it be a fault) found in other artists than Romney. If his women and children possess grace, his men sitters possess dignity and power. Romney may have idealized, but we may feel certain that behind that idealism there was a strict adherence to truth which was very convincing. It was a Romney that led Horace Walpole to exclaim :

Full many an artist has on canvas fix'd
All charms that nature's pencil ever miss'd ;
The witchery of eyes, the grace that tips
The inexpressible *douceur* of the lips—
Romney alone, in this fair image caught
Each charm's expression, and each feature's thought,
And shows how in their sweet assemblage sit
Taste, Spirit, Softness, Sentiment, and Wit.

And, judging from the scarcity of Walpole's references to Romney, we may infer that these lines were written to please Lady Craven rather than Romney. Yet we can match their acknowledgment of Romney's power to depict feminine beauty with Richard Cumberland's poetic tribute, and William Cowper's heartfelt sonnet, both of which show delight in the delineation of masculine features. Old John Wesley's written tribute is referred to elsewhere. Let it be admitted that Romney was a less learned man than Reynolds, that he could not read character so clearly as his great rival, that he lacked anatomical knowledge ; he was yet able to see his sitters with an eye that was lacking to others of his contemporaries and had a power of rendering their features with a sympathetic touch that dwelt with the portrait for all time. " He best can paint 'em who shall feel 'em most," sings Pope. One believes that in many instances Romney had more sympathetic feeling behind his brush, and that, while he was one of the simplest of painters, he was also one of the most artistic in his methods and his productions. His methods were his



National Gallery

Lady and Child
George Romney

own. This self-made artist deviated but little from the early principles of his art. These principles were the outcome of his own experiment and his own initiative. He stands out in his day as a man who borrowed little or nothing in the matter of precept from any earlier, or any contemporary masters. That he was influenced later on in life one allows ; that he was ever anything other than deeply original in his conceptions of art, or that he borrowed from any special school, one cannot admit.

Those who go to Romney's pictures find a sweetness and a grace which infuse the loveliness with which he was in love, to an extent difficult to express ; that is the quality which has been described as " essentially his own." The very simplicity he depicts is captivating in itself, but the art of the painter is seen still more in the setting of his subject in those " large unfrittered designs " which were the result of his being born a genius in the matter of design—unfaded colour, in those simple tints he loved so much—loveliness, human beauty, natural pose, the superb arrangement and delineation of draperies—all these combined with the

glimpse of dignity that so frequently characterizes his portraits, are just a few of those features which quite naturally charm the amateur. As we look at a Romney we often exclaim, "How natural it is!"

For example, nobody who contrasts Thomas Gainsborough's *Mrs. Bowater* with George Romney's *Lady Milnes* can fail to be struck by the difference in the treatment.* Charming as is the portrait by Gainsborough, with its evidence of the power and skill of the artist's genius, as one turns to Romney's *Lady Milnes* the beauty and grace of his picture completely efface the impressions left by the Gainsborough. The "call" of the picture is unmistakable. Without for one moment implying that the Gainsborough is false, one undoubtedly feels that the Romney is immensely more human, more living. The Gainsborough seems to suggest the manner and dress of a Watteau pastoral. Whether it is an idealised face that turns to gaze at us from the Romney, or whether it is a true, speaking likeness does not matter,

* Reproductions of these two pictures, now in the Frick Collection, America, are given in Mr. W. Roberts' article at South Kensington Library.

but there upon the canvas is a woman's figure, dressed in a plain brown satin dress, of which the bodice gracefully lies around the softly moulded breast, and the skirt drops in rich folds to where the dainty ankles peep so naturally above the little shoes pressed lightly on the ground. The rich train flows sweeping away. Upon her head lies tilted, at a charmingly coquettish angle, a big picture-hat covered with splendid plumes of white ostrich feathers. The lady's left arm is advanced so that the slender hand may rest its finger-tips upon a pillar. The white puffed sleeve lies directly in a line under the white feathers and between them comes the white glow of the skin of the face and neck. There is not only womanly grace, but there is, as it were, feminine sovereignty in the whole poise; yet it is just that sovereignty which, one realizes, might so easily melt into human love and joy. When these two pictures lie side by side one wonders how ever it can have been that this artist who could paint so captivatingly the grace and charm of the women of his age could have lived so long under a cloud. One does not at all wonder

at the readiness of the Americans to acquire Romney's portraits: one only marvels at the fact that our nation so readily parts with its inheritance. In this picture of *Lady Milnes* (a member of the Bentinck family) one understands the truth of the saying that, while Reynolds is often stagey and theatrical, and Gainsborough endues his sitters with a dignity which, if it is true to life, must have made the originals difficult persons to get on with, Romney's whole-lengths are essentially human. In the portrait of *Lady Isabella Hamilton* one gets a sort of parallel to Lady Milnes' picture. There is the same feminine loveliness, true womanliness, and reality. The two portraits are, so to speak, companionable.

It has been pointed out that the fashions of the day, the low-cut bodices, frilled or draped round the bosom, frilled again at the wrists; the high-waisted skirts, full-trained and flowing in Grecian style round the feet, were all in Romney's favour. John Flaxman bears direct tribute to the artistic skill of the man he admired so much: "He practised no deception to gain popularity. When he began to paint he had seen no

gallery of pictures, nor fine productions of ancient sculpture, but men, women and children were his statues and all objects under the cope of heaven formed his school of painting. . . . Indeed, his genius bore a strong resemblance to the scenes he was born in ; like them, it partook of the grand and beautiful ; and like them also, the bright sunshine and enchanting prospects of his fancy were occasionally overspread with mist and gloom. . . . As Romney was gifted with peculiar powers for historical and ideal painting, so his heart and soul were engaged in the pursuit of it whenever he could extricate himself from the important business of portrait painting. It was his delight by day and study by night, and for this his food and rest were often neglected." With regard to the drapery of Romney, Flaxman says that it was "well understood, either forming the figure into a mass with one or two deep folds only, or by its adhesion and transparency discovering the form of the figure, the lines of which were finely varied with the trains or expansions of spiral or cascade folds, composing with or contrasting the outline and *chiaroscuro* : he was so

passionately fond of Grecian sculpture that he filled his study and galleries with fine casts from the most perfect statues, *basso-relievos* and busts of antiquity: he would sit and consider these in profound silence by the hour."

The spectator so often feels as he looks at a Romney that he is not simply looking at a portrait, but at a picture. It is true that the costumes of the day fell in with the artist's study of Grecian simplicity; but he combined effect with grace, and grace with circumstance. He admitted that he knew little of anatomy and he is most severely criticised from the point of view of his draughtsmanship. It is urged that his forms are apt to be unmodelled and "boneless;" that his hands lack character; that his figures have no depth or roundness. And the same critic who draws attention to these charges, asks himself almost in the manner of an Old Testament writer: "Who would desire to count the ribs of beauty; or take thought for the muscular contraction of a soft, rounded arm?"*

* R. C. Witt in *The Nineteenth Century*.

Romney employs the soft powdered hair of the day with the tilt of the picture hat, or folds of the large mob cap, to form a gentle contrast with a soft background of brown trees, and subdued light from clouded skies. The man puts into his portraits what he has not borrowed from others but derived from himself—that indefinable something which goes to constitute what we call a “Romney.” And who can precisely say what that is? We are told of Raphael Mengs, Romney’s German contemporary, that his object was to gather the expression of Raphael, the colour of Titian, the *chiaroscuro* of Correggio, and the drawing of ancient sculpture. One cannot for a moment think of Romney in such terms. Just as the mind of Shakespeare took in the literary material he borrowed and in the crucible of his intellect transformed it into something essentially his own, so Romney, the poet-painter, gives us the pure essence of his own artistic imagery. More than any other painter Romney grasped the fleeting spirit of beauty, and he remains for us both seer and poet in this realm of his art. That is why we refer to him as a great possession of the

English school of painters ; that is why he survived the lapse of fifty years and the neglect of a nation, to emerge into ever-increasing fame ; that is why we feel that the general public who certainly has no desire " to count the ribs of beauty " will continue, the more it sees, the more to admire his pictures. It is to be deplored that he employed bitumen, so that in our time we meet with canvases that are darkened and blistered, bearing their eloquent testimony against this fault. But somebody has adapted the remark of Sir George Beaumont made in reference to Reynolds, and has put it that " a faded portrait by Romney is better than a fresh one by anyone else." However, we submit the argument that for Romney's pictures to fade is fatal, for pre-eminently in their colour lies much of their charm. We propose, therefore, at this juncture to summarise the views of modern critics, and endeavour to ascertain what it is that wins the admiration of the ordinary spectator for a Romney.

Romney in his originality is essentially English. He was the painter who best reflected the sentiment of the age in which

he lived, and he does this with elegance and grace. In his art, as we have shown, he absorbs and employs for his purpose the charm of the costume of the period. In picture after picture we come across the simple white drapery, with perhaps a ribbon, or a waistband, of blue (of which he is fond),* or it may be green. One critic, as we have remarked, says that Romney "merely moved the parts of the mask" and gives us the same type of face again and again. It seems almost needless to point out that such a criticism can be applied to other great portrait painters as well as to Romney. The mere novice learns to recognise certain types common to great artists, and recognises the period when the portrait was painted not only by the attire but by the countenance of the subject. A visit to the National Portrait Gallery to see Sir Peter Lely's pictures will confirm this statement. As one stands before the portrait of *Anna Maria Brudenell*, Countess of Shrewsbury, and that of *Eleanor Gwyn*, it is clear that Mr. D. C. McColl's criticism of

* E.g., In the charming portrait of *Mrs. Robert Trotter of Bush* (National Gallery).

Romney is equally true of this earlier artist. The two women might almost be sisters, according to feature and appearance.

Another critic speaking of Romney puts it that we find constantly the "same eyes, nose, and mouth . . . the straight well-defined eyebrows, the large melting eyes and softly curved lips occur again and again,"* because his lodestar in beauty was Lady Hamilton. The thought comes at times whether this type of beauty was simply that of Lady Hamilton, or whether it was partly hers and partly something that existed in Romney's mind. The photographic copy of the intaglio by Rega, done by him towards the end of the eighteenth century, does not entirely suggest that winsome, smiling grace one meets so often in Romney's pictures of Lady Hamilton. It is quite probable that Romney brought his ideal into his workmanship; that there was something manifestly exceptional about the "divine lady" is attested to from so many quarters. Reynolds, Madame Vigée le Brun, Angelica Kauffmann, and Italian painters and

* R. C. Witt in *The Nineteenth Century*.

sculptors, all tried their skill upon her ; but it is Romney alone who catches that witchery, that delicate archness so definitely associated with his portraits of her, and it may well be that either he saw what they could not see, or that her beauty awoke in him suggestions of his youth which, like the morning light resting upon the countryside, bestowed a freshness and a fragrance all its own.

The pose and the costume of Romney's portraits are often of the most studied simplicity, and suggestive of youth and naturalness. He was painting in a transition period when the artificial wig and hoop were giving place to classical fillet and gown. His portraits, apart from his type of beauty, are not imaginative in execution. The sitter was painted as seen. Even in the Hamilton portraits all the accessories are actual copies, and so true in this that Romney seems to forestall the modern realist. Thus he appears to us less antiquated than his contemporaries and so makes a direct appeal to our sympathy. While he will not live as a painter of historical or imaginative subjects, yet in his character

of the portrait painter of the charm and grace of his day, and able to invest even that with subtle and delicate interest, Romney must continue to live, for his portraits will always reach the heart, even though they may not appeal to the intellect.

Yet it is worth while to draw attention to the fact that even the portraits of Emma Hamilton offer interesting studies in the matter of face and feature. For example, anyone who will compare *Emma Hamilton in a Black Hat* (painted in 1792), and *Emma Hamilton in Morning Dress* (1786), with the face of Emma when she represents Comedy in *Shakespeare Nursed by Tragedy and Comedy* (1791), cannot fail to be struck by the difference. The two former suggest a face which is somewhat rounded, full, a little inclined to be heavy, with less of the spiritual and more of the material and yet hinting at the childlike. The face in each of these instances is placid, and the nose is inclined to be broad and somewhat retroussé. In the picture of Comedy we come again to that other face, elf-like, full of laughter and spirit, with a suggestion of piquancy, melting into light laughter, with the nose

long and straight and the chin pointed—the sort of face that looks out at us from dozens of portraits. The former type approximates somewhat to the intaglio by Rega, the Italian artist; the latter, we suggest, is Emma Hamilton idealised by Romney and conforming to a type which one is inclined to think is partly hinted at in portraits painted by Romney before he ever met with the “divine lady.”

Is it possible that in many of Romney's portraits, both earlier than, and contemporary with, the time of Emma's appearance in the studio, we have a persistent type which came to him earlier in life, even, perhaps, before he left the north for London? In the long, slightly aquiline nose, arched eye-brows and full curved lips bordering on laughter and always smiling, it may be that we have a type of feminine beauty that the boy, and young man, met with frequently in the north-west country whence he came. Certain it is that it is possible for the theoriser to read into the portrait of *Mrs. Maxwell* painted in 1780, or of *Miss Woodley* (painted that same year) something of the same rich expression, something of the same

idea of features which we are wont to associate with the woman who first came to him in 1782. In fact, to say that Romney always paints the same face, but only moves the parts of the mask a little, is not accurate. One can cite more than one type. It may be that anyone who cared to do so could classify Romney's women-faces into groups of which there were certainly three, and probably more. One may mention that *Mrs. Ann Pitt* (1788), *Lady Sligo* (1788), and *Mrs. Tickell* (1791) have the shortened *retroussé* nose clearly differentiated from the long pointed nose so often met with in other portraits, *e.g.*, *Mrs. Robinson*.

In the next place one notices the lure of colour in Romney's work. Whatever else Steele taught him, he certainly showed him how to grind and mix colour. In his pictures (except those where bitumen has wrought havoc or restoration too zealously applied has hidden original colour under the gleam of varnish) one discovers a singularly pure sweet tone—and that is true of his pictures throughout, from his earliest to his latest. There is a lofty artistic feeling in his colours which combined with his simplicity—one of



The Beaumont Family
GEORGE ROMNEY

National Gallery

his chief characteristics—attracts the eye and claims sympathy. He outlines grace and dignity, physical beauty and power, in colours that are laid so finely on the picture that we can see the twilled canvas (which he nearly always employed) beneath the pigment—as, for example, in that magnificent group *The Beaumont Family* at the National Gallery. In the bent leg of the man who is leaning on the back of the chair upon which the lady is sitting one can see how thinly the artist has spread his paint. As for this picture, one cannot but marvel at its retained freshness. Splendid in colouring and grouping, it looks almost as though it had but yesterday left the artist's studio.

From the point of view of technique Romney had the great faculty of painting his figures simply and directly. He prepared his own pigments with a thoroughness born of the ardour which his work invariably inspired in him, with the result that his portraits, generally speaking, retain this pristine freshness and charm which the ravages of time have left untouched. In this respect his work compares favourably with that of his great contemporaries and

rivals who so often, by means of glazing, created a fascinating brilliance which was only temporary, as may be well illustrated by the present dull and spiritless state of some of the paintings of Sir Joshua Reynolds. For this reason we can go to Romney's pictures almost as though they were being newly displayed, and judge clearly the charm of the original work. His brushwork was direct, each stroke left a trace on the canvas. There is no stippling, or glazing, or even working up, in his best work, and it is only fair that we should judge him by that. We can see in some of his pictures evidence of rapid work that has been left just as it was accomplished, and not even retouched. One may cite in this connection the *Lady with the Child on Her Lap* as shown in the picture in the National Gallery. We say, therefore, that he excelled in the grinding and mixing of his colours, and though his palette does not compare with those of his rivals in extent, he scores over them from the technical point of view by reason of its permanence. There are, of course, eminent critics to whom Romney makes no appeal, and who express their lack of

admiration pretty strongly ; but the general public, lacking close knowledge of those features for which the critic, from force of training, searches first of all, sees the charm in the graceful, easy serenity of Romney's figures, and feels the pleasing effects of his colours. Romney may be shallow in his effects, but he inevitably charms with his favourite blending of softened white and blue of robes, softly powdered hair, and background of trees in brown. As time went on he tended to abandon the *chiaroscuro* effects of the old masters, with the brown background which was favoured by Reynolds, and he became inclined to adopt light greys and greens.

It has been pointed out that in some essentials the early Romney is the later Romney. The figures of his early works are somewhat hard and stiff, while his colour scheme is not always harmonious ; but after his visits to France and Italy, when the spell of the influence of Correggio and Parmigiano had fallen upon him, he mellowed and refined his work. Yet, all through his career his innate genius is felt in its original impulse. Romney, as we

know, was born and reared in the lake district, and in his youth and early manhood he studied nature in all her purity, and revelled in the glories of nature's moods as they clothed the hillsides of his native country with robes of purple and green and violet. His eye rested again and again on the richness of the sunset, which, when it paints the clouds in glorious hues, so often makes the ordinary beholder envy the power of the painter. To a man so quick to perceive, and so burning with enthusiasm, this perception must have been more than a real joy, it was something that entered into his very soul to become part of it. The result is reflected in work where our eyes are satisfied by a perfectly blended harmony of colour which is luminous without being exaggerated, and stands before us unforced and natural. We accept as indisputably true such remarks as "he lived for his art, and the more he painted the greater was his flow of spirits." "He was in love with art and in love with loveliness." We accept, unmoved, the assertion that he was less learned than Reynolds, yet we question the statement that he did not explore below the

surface to discern character, but willingly accepted what he found written upon the face. One admits that Romney employed sympathy rather than philosophy, gathering, wherever he could find it, the freshness and innocence of youth, the glow of life, especially the grace of dawning maturity unspoiled as yet by the severe lines and blemishing defects that come with years and the growth of passion. This phase he painted with that self-restraint which checked any search for complex effect or for hazardous experiment. He was a classicist, and being full of ideas with regard to the dignity of art, he wove these ideas into the subject of his brush. If only in his youth he could have read and learned, in conjunction with the teachings of nature, the canons of art, if only in later life he could have become absorbed in the works of the great dramatists and poets, so that their inspiration might have intermarried with his genius for interpretation, we might have received from his hands a greatness not simply of charm but blended with the strength of the very loftiest powers of the artist. It is worth noticing, as we pass,

that, while Hayley says it may be questioned if Romney ever read without interruption two acts of the drama which he cordially admired, Colonel James Romney, the brother of the artist, wrote to say that Mr. Romney, their father, was a great reader who could borrow many works from his neighbours; and he adds that George had these and read them with peculiar pleasure. What is apparent is that, owing to his early lack of training and his subsequent endeavours to overtake time, the artist had little time in his maturity to allow reading to proceed hand in hand with his imaginative faculties.

With regard to Romney's power to discern and reveal what lay behind, as well as what was depicted by the features, we offer the four following accounts of four portraits, and make the suggestion that many other pictures might easily be cited to show the very opposite to the criticism that Romney did not read character.

(a) The simpering expression of the spoiled beauty pervades the portrait of the famous *Mrs. Blair* (1787), the bosom friend of Kitty, Marchioness of Queensbury. On the

over-dressed hair is set the fashionable, be-feathered Gainsborough hat, and the whole surmounts a face broad and high of forehead, yet showing in the somewhat narrow eyes and long nose an absence of depth of character. The mouth is elongated, with lips neither full nor thin but slightly scornful, as though the flattery, with its obvious insincerity, scarce satisfied. The gown, ruffled over a tightly-laced waist and high bosom, remind one that subservience to the creed of fashion is no new trait in woman's character. Here is one of those many women who say "Better be artificial and in fashion, than true to life and unfashionable." As we look at this portrait we think of a tame but spoiled cat that must be constantly stroked, fussed and fed regularly with cream and tit-bits.

(b) Romney's portrait of *Wesley* was painted at the request of Mrs. Tighe, an ardent admirer of the great preacher. As we regard this splendid face, with its broad, scholarly brow, strong firm mouth curved with humour, the long and somewhat prominent nose proclaiming powerful

character, and the eyes wide apart but revealing a somewhat dreamy gaze suggestive at once of the mystic and of the deep searcher of the human heart, the thought comes that here is a portrait worthy of both the painter and the painted. The long white locks lie loosely on the shoulders and harmonise with the gentle serenity of the face—the face of an old man who has climbed the dangerous ascents of life and reached the loftiest summit of age, whence he can behold without fear the valley that lies beyond. Although the upward climb has been arduous, yet only sweet compassion now remains for fellow toilers up life's path. A noble dignity speaks to us from the spiritualised but soldierly features. The expression seems to plead for love and to promise genuine, noble friendship. The strong heats of earlier life have burned down into the calm quiet dignity of age. The light from above falls fully on the placid, smiling countenance as the rays of evening fall upon the calm surface of some river that has left its leaping impulse far behind, and now in wider reaches at the end of its course flows strongly to meet the ocean not far

ahead. Only two years after this portrait was painted Wesley died at the age of eighty-eight.

(c) A strong contrast to many of Romney's portraits of women is that of *Lady Griffin* (Lady Howard de Walden). This portrait was painted in the year 1782-3, about the time, therefore, when Emma was first exerting her charms upon his artistic temperament. The soft and loving grace of womanhood so often felt in Romney's portraits seems strangely absent as we gaze upon the almost powerful features of Lady Griffin. Undoubtedly this was a woman of strong personality; her mouth denotes a firmness which boded ill for anybody who chanced to be not entirely on her side. Under the mouth the flesh lies somewhat heavily padded around and under the chin, speaking of a heavy and rather sensual type. The eyes convey a feeling of hardness which is substantiated by the lines of the mouth. Humour is strangely absent; the mouth smiles, but only with satisfaction. One feels inclined to say, "Griffin by name and griffin by nature!" The whole portrait suggests

a stiffness and rigidity, from the head-dress downwards ; even the left hand opens as if to lay down a point in the argument. Surely, Lady Griffin lived too soon. In later days she might have led in powerful wise some modern section of a feminist movement.

(d) A curious hint of modernity surrounds the portrait of *Mrs. Ann Pitt*, the best portrait of the type, which appeared about the year 1788. The rounded face is surmounted by a mass of thick, softly curling hair which is held in place by a broad white bandeau. Round the wide forehead and over the ears cling escaping tendrils of hair. The expression of the face, tender, appealing and childlike, is accentuated by the upward glance of the full, dark eyes set beneath curved eyebrows. The short *retroussé* nose, with its arched nostrils, hints at the mischievousness of a child's nature. The mouth, with full and slightly parted lips, completes the delicate study hinted at in the soft, smooth cheeks.

Sustained effort is always difficult to

maintain. The high standard of excellence demanded from a painter of the first rank can only be continued for a limited period, after which the result is more than likely to be unsatisfactory. As we look at the *Sketch Portrait of Lady Hamilton* (in the National Gallery) we remember that this woman was of a highly emotional temperament, many-sided in character, possessed a command over facial expression and had all the gifts of an accomplished and trained actress. Romney has caught a passing phase of this mobile model's ever-changing features. If, as Ruskin asserts, "finish is added truth," would this portrait have been of more artistic value, or more pleasing to the eye, had it been finished? Romney has shown us the wondrous colouring of her hair and skin, of her eyes and lips; he has captured the beauty of the form of the oval face, soft and bewitching. He reveals the delicate shape of the neck and throat. All these are in the portrait. But above and beyond is the vivacity of the woman suggested in the poise of her head, the flash of the eyes, and the hand clutching the hair, as if the result of a sudden impulse. The

picture arrests attention. It enables the spectator to realise, in some measure, the magnetic personality of this woman who was composed of such a strange mixture of virtue and vice, and who could exert so powerfully an influence on men who were distinctly opposite in taste and temperament. It should be noted to Lady Hamilton's credit that this subtle and irresistible influence was not always connected with the grosser passions. In some cases it was so, but not in all. As we have seen, her letters to Romney point clearly to an unselfish regard for the man, and to a friendship that was perfectly innocent, and, therefore, quite beyond the average understanding of an age which was not merely complacent and self-satisfied, but to a degree gross and sensual.

The study of *Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante* is one of Romney's best known portraits of his favourite model. In all probability it enables us to form a better conception of her real appearance and witchery of manner than any other of his works. Romney's brush conveys in the colour of cheeks and lips the suggestion of a beautiful pink rose. He shows us her wonderful auburn hair,

wavy and wayward as herself. Blue eyes set wide apart, perfect teeth, and broad forehead speak of beauty as well as of powerful personality. The painter has portrayed piquancy and daintiness with no suggestion whatever of vulgarity or lack of modesty. One can scarcely regard this charming creature as a devotee of Bacchus.

The hall-mark of Romney's work is his perfect sincerity and absence of artifice in the method of his painting. This fact stands out strongly in the portrait of the younger *Pitt*. Romney, as we have said, was trained in the school of nature. His mind and his manner of handling his subject were free from convention. He brought from the north the conceptions of colour he had early formed from a study of the pictures painted there by the Creator of his native fells and dales, of the lakes and meres with their ripples and reflections. In this way he may be said to be a prototype of the Pre-Raphaelites and to have anticipated, by more than a generation, their search for the truth in the matter of colour.

From the emotional standpoint the art of Romney is seen at its best in his portraiture

of women and children. Who can compare Reynold's *Lady Cockburn and her Children* with Romney's *Gower Family* and fail to be prejudiced in favour of the lesser artist? The painting of the female figure was to him a real joy, and when his subject was the beautiful woman who became to him an obsession, the subtle charm of her personality and the exquisite beauty and grace of her limbs and features, combined with her unusual histrionic powers, are rendered again and again in his portraits with the same intensity of ardour as when they first ravished and conquered his susceptible nature.

Romney emulated the highest masters whenever he could spare time from the daily grind of portrait painting; though his faculty for imparting a tale of grandeur had its limitations, yet his constructive genius was great and convincing. Lord R. Gower says that "if Romney had never painted a portrait his name would even then stand very high among the artists of Britain, for some of his poetic and dramatic compositions are replete with imaginative power." Among those scenes from Shakespeare for

which he had an intense admiration, some are boldly conceived, and executed with the skill and power of a great painter. We may regard imaginative painting as the recreation in which he indulged whenever occasion offered. But his living had to be won in the painting of portraits. Had he been able to devote more time to his favourite delineation of imagery, had his entire training been effective to this end, Romney would not only have been a happier man, but would have left us, in all probability, a canvas equal to the works of the greatest. One of the tragedies of his life seems to be that powerful inclination which towards the close of his life led him to set his mind upon the outline of vast historical and religious compositions without the power to execute them adequately.

CHAPTER V.

ROMNEY'S INFLUENCE ON CONTEMPORARIES AND SUCCESSORS, AND ON PUBLIC TASTE.

Romney's captivating grace brought a constant train of sitters to his canvas. It is difficult to determine to what extent he influenced contemporary art. Even when one has attempted to answer the question, the suspicion remains that too much or too little has been said. We have referred to the manner in which Romney held aloof from the Royal Academy, and also to the secluded path he trod. From temperament and from lack of earlier opportunities he was inclined to remain largely shut off from social activities and functions. "His art was entirely intimate, personal to himself even more than to his sitters." For our purpose it will be as well to take a brief review of

some of those artists who seem more directly to have fallen under Romney's influence, frankly omitting any attempt to trace any mark of his characteristic traits upon his greater rivals. We read of his copying the pictures of certain of his outstanding contemporaries; whether they condescended to adopt any lessons from him is a question that must lie beyond the scope of our enquiry.

When John Flaxman (1755-1826) was introduced to Romney, a bond of sympathy already existed between them. Each had suffered the keenest disappointment at the hands of the famous and powerful President of the Royal Academy of Arts. In 1770 Flaxman, who was a student at the Academy School, then in its second year of existence, possessed so much courage and ability that, although he was only a lad of fifteen, he competed for the Gold Medal. He was confident that he would win the coveted prize. Romney had been equally confident when, in the spring of 1763, he had exhibited *The Death of General Wolfe*. Flaxman just missed the gold medal, which went to Englehart, the miniature painter, and he had

to be contented with the silver medal—no mean honour for such a youth. As we have remarked elsewhere, Romney was not so successful as the younger man.

Flaxman and Romney met at the house of a clergyman in Rathbone Place, and this acquaintance developed into an intimate and lasting friendship. "Our dear and worthy Flaxman," says Romney, "whose talents I admire and place before every other artist." The connection of the sculptor with the firm of Wedgwood is well known, and it was his genius as a modeller of ornament, and especially of the human figure, that very materially influenced the current taste and fashion in artistic pottery and made the name of Wedgwood known all over the world. It was now that Romney exercised, consciously or unconsciously, a considerable influence over his younger brother in art, and we have already shown how Flaxman expressed in deliberate language his profound admiration for Romney's ability as an exponent of the plastic art, and leads us to believe that, had the artist chosen to do so, he might have become equally famous as a modeller or sculp-

tor, or wood-carver. Flaxman's intimacy with Romney necessarily made the younger man take note of his friend's masterly treatment of the figure—especially after Romney had studied the antique in Italy. He seems to have imparted some of his love for the antique to his young friend from the very beginning of their association. True it is that the grouping of the figures seen in the masterly modelling work that Flaxman did for Wedgwood was nothing less than the work of a genius, and was beyond and apart from any extraneous influence. But the figure clearly became more graceful under his touch, and the modelling more delicate and subtle, as his friendship with Romney ripened. We should remember that it was not until after most of his personal work for the famous firm of potters had been accomplished that Flaxman visited Italy, and came into direct touch with the work of the great masters, although he had for many years earnestly desired to do so. He remained in Italy for seven years, studying and perfecting his art. If anyone cares to do so he may draw a parallel with Romney from the fact that Flaxman's work is pure

and simple, is executed in the true classic spirit, but at times shows weakness in portraying the stronger emotions. Both Romney and Flaxman were "classically minded," votaries of pure lines, and deep believers in Greek ideals of art.

Romney had much to do with fashioning the career and developing the artistic ability of Isaac Pocock, who became his pupil in 1798 and was the fellow-student of Thomas A. Hayley. It was during one of his prolonged visits to the elder Hayley that Romney drew the portraits of these two pupils. Under Romney's tuition Pocock progressed so satisfactorily that his pictures were exhibited at the Royal Academy for many years. In 1807 he was awarded a prize of one hundred pounds by the British Institution for a historical painting entitled *The Murder of St. Thomas à Becket*. Pocock's fame was not confined to London. He became a member of the Liverpool Academy, where he exhibited works both in oil and water colours. His native home was Bristol, where his father was well known as a marine painter. An uncle resided in the same town, and, when he died, leaving

Isaac a considerable sum of money, the artist was enabled to devote his attention to the dream for which for some time he had possessed a great affection. Henceforth he almost ceased his labours as an artist. He became a playwright and composed many musical comedies, the chief of which was "Hit or Miss."

The modern student would like to establish some identity of interests or association in art between Benjamin West, the American painter, and George Romney. West was a powerful painter, and a contemporary of the subject of this book, but one admits that his influence on the Englishman was merely negative. As a portrait painter he stood coldly aside through force of circumstances, leaving the field, so far as he was concerned, clear for Romney, while he himself was engaged upon his historical canvases for the King. It would be, one ventures to assert, a difficult task to decide whether Romney or West influenced the other, directly or indirectly.

One of George Romney's closest companions was Ozias Humphry, whose intimate and cordial friendship he enjoyed for many

years. Upcott, Humphry's natural son, tells us that for a considerable time the two great artists had studios adjoining, and each must have been the richer from the study of the other's work.* These lodgings were at the Golden Head—the usual sign of artists—in Great Newport Street. Romney painted Humphry's portrait in 1772, at Knole, just before the two friends left England for Rome. They travelled to Italy in a leisurely fashion, for Humphry was at that time a nervous wreck. His recent love affairs had not sped happily. Miss Paine, the daughter of a well-known architect of the time, had jilted him. Subsequently she married Tilly Kettle.

On reaching Italy, Romney and Humphry continued to live together only for a short time. Romney was reserved, almost austere, anxious, as we have seen, to capture the years that had fled. He studied incessantly. Humphry was a man of fashion who loved society. Thus it was that their paths at this time soon parted, although the spirit of their friendship lived and thrived. When

* See *The Life and Works of Ozias Humphry, R.A.*,
by G. C. Williamson, Litt.D.

Humphry returned to London, some two years after Romney had resumed his task of portrait-painting, he again picked up the threads of intimate friendship with his travelling companion. They were now often in each other's company. Humphry was elected A.R.A. in 1779. For the most part the two men, so often together, seem to have worked separately for the same reason that prompted each to go his own way in Italy. Romney liked to work in quiet and seclusion; Humphry loved to be surrounded by men of wit and fashion, whose conversation seems to have inspired rather than hindered him. We must recollect their earlier visits to Knole Park, the seat of the Duke of Dorset, where they both painted pictures which still remain in the mansion (including one of *Ozias Humphry* by Romney) and can be identified by papers in the possession of the Sackville family.

These two artists had a real admiration for each other's work. This is evident from the fact that, consciously or unconsciously, they acquired each other's style to a very considerable degree. In 1810, the year of the artist's death, William Upton wrote to

a relative of Humphry, saying that he was glad that his godfather's pictures were to be sold with those of George Romney, and that Mr. Christie had in the sale the works of two artists who in their days had been such intimate friends. Ozias has left a record that Romney was "an eminent man and his great friend." These facts are stressed because it was the introduction of a life-sized head of *Mrs. Banks* by the miniature painter that was of the greatest value in deciding the difference in technique between Romney and Humphry, when, in May, 1917, before Justice Darling, it took six days to prove that the real painter of the portrait of *The Three Sisters Waldegrave* was Ozias Humphry and not George Romney.* The most eminent authorities were strangely divided in their opinions; and the case brought out clearly the likeness and affinity between the styles of these two artists. It had been forgotten how Romney and Humphry had been such close friends, living, travelling, and, at times, working side by side. It has even been suggested that

* See *The Cult of Old Paintings*. The case was reported in *The Daily Telegraph*.

Romney might have stood by his friend's easel making this or that suggestion, or even taking a brush and executing what his eye saw was desirable. Humphry's work is praised for its refinement, simplicity, correct draughtsmanship and harmonious colouring. Is it too much to assign the development of some of these qualities to the influence of the older and less trained artist? Ozias in his youth was encouraged and assisted by Sir Joshua Reynolds ; his talent in later life clearly approximated to the methods of Romney.

When Ozias Humphry returned to London in 1777 he established himself in Rathbone Place, and there, in October of that same year, came to him as a pupil John Opie, a youth of fifteen. Thirty-two years later Opie, the professor of painting to the Royal Academy, delivered the knowledge and experience of his life in a series of four lectures, of which it is said that, with the exception of those of Sir Joshua Reynolds, "there are no other lectures emanating from the Royal Academy more original and just." They deal with Design, Invention, Chiaroscuro, and Colouring. The point to notice

is that Opie in these lectures mentions frequently Sir Joshua Reynolds ; he dilates upon Rubens, Rembrandt and other names of giants in art. But nowhere does he mention Romney. By 1810, so far as we can judge, Romney's reputation had undergone a rapid decline. The sale at Christie's in 1807 realised but very low prices. There were no influential friends to boom his pictures. The portrait of *Lady Almeria Carpenter* was sold for a guinea and a half. The tide turned afterwards, but it is significant that this young contemporary should not notice his great fellow artist. In the Boydell Plates (two volumes in sepia) at South Kensington, there are copies of the pictures done for Boydell's Galleries by Romney, Opie, Smirke, Stothard and Wheatley. One suggests that in the work of Opie and Smirke, but especially in that of Opie, there are, in these plates, certain peculiarities of nose and mouth which are often very much in evidence and hint at the art of Romney. The question arises whether these artists were influenced by Romney or Romney by either of them. Did these artists all draw from one model, especially

from Emma Hamilton? Was there at that period a sort of type, a growth of the years in which it occurs, something without any special reference to any individual painter? The peculiarities are to be traced slightly in the works of Stothard, Westley, and West. In Romney's *Prospero and Miranda* we have the Emma Hamilton face, but with nose and mouth less strongly marked and the face rounder than in his *Cassandra Raving*, a full-length figure of Emma Hamilton draped and with the face uplifted. In this picture the arms are somewhat too fleshy in proportion to the figure. In his *Infant Shakespeare Attended by Nature and the Passions* one feels that the general aspect of the picture does not closely approximate to the bulk of Romney's work. But it is to the long nose and strongly-curved mouth, features decidedly in evidence in Romney's pictures, and at least suggested in the works of the other artists, that one specially draws attention, and asks whether there was a common model, or a common type, or a common inspiration?

We have referred earlier to a comparison between a picture of Romney's and some of

Tilly Kettle's productions. In the National Gallery there is a portrait of Warren Hastings said to have been executed by Tilly Kettle, and catalogued as such. The National Gallery acquired this portrait in 1859, and then it was catalogued as a Romney. Messrs. Ward & Roberts include the portrait of Warren Hastings among Romney's works, and say that the portrait described as being " painted in India by Tilly Kettle, which is now in the National Portrait Gallery, was catalogued as by Romney in 1859." Here then is one more portrait which has led authorities to differ, and seems to point to the influence of one artist upon the style and execution of another. One notices in passing that the portrait of *Lord Kenyon*, attributed to Martin Archer Shee, was partly Romney's work. The essential part, at least, the head, was the work of his hands.

APPENDIX I.

PICTURES BY ROMNEY IN GALLERIES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

NATIONAL GALLERY.	Approx. date
Mrs. Robert Trotter of Bush (2943)	1789
The Beaumont Family (3400)	1776-8
Lady and Child (1667)	1782
Sketch of Lady Hamilton (1668)	
Lady Hamilton (head only)	
The Parson's Daughter (1058)	

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.	
Lady Hamilton (294)	
Richard Cumberland (19)	1776
John Flaxman (101)	
James Harris (185)	
Lloyd, Lord Kenyon (469). (First catalogued under Shee, who completed the portrait, the majority of which is by Romney.)	1792
George Romney (unfinished—by himself) (959)	
John Smeaton (doubtful Romney; ? Rhodes) (80)	1779
Adam Walker and family (1106)	
William Cowper—	
1. Crayon drawing (1423)	
2. Painting (372)	
Peter Romney (miniature) (1882)	
Robert Raikes (1551)	

TATE GALLERY.	
Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante (312)	
Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Lindow (3196)	1770
Mrs. Mark Currie (1651)	1789
Lady Craven (1669)	1778
Jacob Morland (1906)	
William Pitt the Younger (2280)	1783

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.

"Serena" (? Honora Edgeworth, *née*
Sneyd) *before* 1780

BIRMINGHAM (CITY ART GALLERY).

Lady Holte 1781-3

CAMBRIDGE (CHRIST'S COLLEGE).

Archdeacon Paley 1789

—(CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE).

William Colman, D.D. 1779

—(EMMANUEL COLLEGE).

Rev. R. Farmer 1777

Samuel Parr, D.D. 1788

Earl of Westmorland 1782

—(FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM).

Portrait of a Young Man

—(GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE).

Samuel Parr, D.D. (*copy*) 1788

—(MAGDALENE COLLEGE).

Richard Cumberland

—(ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE).

Sir Noah Thomas 1781

—(TRINITY COLLEGE).

Duke of Gloucester 1790

DULWICH COLLEGE.

Joseph Allen, M.D. 1778

ETON COLLEGE.

Lord Boston 1783

W. W. Grenville 1781

Charles Grey 1784

Mr. Herbert

Hon. William King 1788

Mr. Lane (*replica*)

Mr. Simpson 1789

William Tighe 1781

FISHMONGER'S HALL.

The Margrave of Anspach 1793

The Margravine of Anspach 1793

GREENWICH HOSPITAL.

Adm. Hon. John Forbes

1778

Adm. Sir Charles Hardy

1780

HARROW SCHOOL.

John Sayer

1770

HERTFORD HOUSE (WALLACE COLLECTION).

Mrs. Robinson as Perdita

1778

MANCHESTER (CITY ART GALLERY).

Hon. Thomas Cherbury Bligh

1782

——(CHETHAM'S LIBRARY).

Robert Thyer

OXFORD (CHRIST CHURCH).

Dr. Cleaver

1796

W. W. Grenville (*reputed Romney*)

?1781

Sir A. Macdonald

1793

Duke of Portland

1794

Edward Smallwell

1794

Lord Stormont

1783

——(NEW COLLEGE).

Dr. John Oglander

1778

——(TRINITY COLLEGE).

Dr. Samuel Johnson (*reputed Romney*)

——(WADHAM COLLEGE).

James Harris (*replica*)

ST. LUKE'S HOSPITAL.

Mr. Prowting

1788

APPENDIX II.

A LIST OF WORKS ON THE LIFE AND ART OF GEORGE ROMNEY.

The following list of books and articles is in no way comprehensive. It simply suggests certain typical works to the attention of the student, who can easily amplify the materials for research by a reference to the Index and Subject Index at the British Museum, and elsewhere.

- | | |
|--|------|
| <i>George Romney</i> (with plates). Lord Ronald Charles Sutherland Gower. | 1904 |
| <i>Romney: a bibliographical and critical essay, with a Catalogue Raisonné of his Works.</i> Thomas Humphrey Ward and William Roberts. | 1904 |
| <i>George Romney</i> (with 73 plates). Arthur Bensley Chamberlain. | 1906 |
| <i>George Romney and his Art.</i> Hilda Gamlin. | 1894 |
| <i>The Cult of Old Paintings and the Romney Case.</i> R. D. Lloyd. | 1917 |
| <i>The Life of George Romney.</i> William Hayley. | 1809 |
| <i>Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney.</i> Rev. John Romney, B.D. | 1830 |
| <i>A Romney Folio.</i> With 68 plates in photo-gravure and an essay with descriptive notes. Arthur Bensley Chamberlain. | 1911 |
| <i>George Romney.</i> Sir William Maxwell. | 1902 |
| <i>The Masterpieces of Romney.</i> (Sixty reproductions). Gowan's Art Books No 36. | 1910 |
| <i>An Illustrated Catalogue of Engraved Portraits and Fancy Subjects painted by G. Romney, published between 1770 and 1830.</i> H. P. Horne. | 1891 |
| <i>The Engraved Works of Romney and Gainsborough.</i> Herbert Percy Horne. | 1891 |

- Romney, Containing sixteen Examples in Colour of the Master's Work.* Randall Davies. 1914
- Stories of the English Artists from Vandyck to Turner.* Randall Davies. 1908
- English Society of the Eighteenth Century in Contemporary Art.* Randall Davies. 1907
- The Life and Works of Ozias Humphry, R.A.* G. C. Williamson. 1918
- A Little Gallery of Romney.* (Methuens.) 1903
- George Romney.* G. Paston. 1903
- Romney's Art* (The Nineteenth Century). R. C. Witt. 1901
- Article on Romney* (The Temple Bar Magazine, Vol. 60). 1880
- Portrait of Mrs. Blair* (The Century Magazine) June, 1911
- Romney.* (Putnam's Monthly). August, 1907
- The Romney Exhibition at the Grafton Gallery* (Magazine of Art). Lionel Cust. 1900
- A Century of Artists.* William Ernest Henley. 1889
- Memoirs of Mr. George Romney.* (The European Magazine, Vol. 43). Richard Cumberland. June, 1803

The reader is also referred to such works as these : *Art in Great Britain and Ireland*, by Sir Walter Armstrong ; *Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* ; *The Life of Romney in the Dictionary of National Biography*, etc.

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